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# TWO KEYS

OR

## Margaret Houghton's Heroism

*By* MRS. GEORGIE SHELDON

AUTHOR OF

"A Thorn Among Roses," "The Little Marplot,"
"Ruby's Reward," "A Heritage
of Love," etc.

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THE TWO KEYS

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# TWO KEYS.

## CHAPTER I.

### THE BIRTHDAY PARTY.

Hark! What is the meaning of those merry, rollicking sounds that come swelling out upon the soft summer air, and thrilling each passer-by with sympathy and delight?

They are the sweetest sounds in all the world, the musical laughter and glad voices of innocent, happy children—the silvery tones of charming, light-hearted little girls, mingled with the more noisy, but not less enjoyable, shouts of strong, lusty boys.

They proceed from the grounds of an elegent estate, situated in the suburbs of a large city, where a jovial company of little folks, with tennis, croquet, swings, and other amusements of various kinds, are giving heart and soul to the business of getting all the sport possible out of the occasion.

It was the birthday of little Margaret Houghton, who was the only child and heiress of Wallace Houghton, Esquire, a retired and wealthy merchant of the city of Boston.

Ten summers had come and gone since a beautiful little daughter had come to gladden this home of wealth and luxury, while every anniversary had been celebrated with feasting, gifts, and merrymaking.

To-day, as the little miss completed her first decade, the fond parents had made greater efforts than ever before to contribute to the happiness of their darling.

A fine large tent had been erected upon the lawn before the house, and from the tall pole that rose from its center, a beautiful silken flag waved gracefully to and fro on the summer breeze, while, besides the games



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without, everything which could possibly serve to interest or amuse a child had been collected within it for that purpose.

The company, of course, was a very select one. Only exceptional children had been bidden to the birthday feast, which, being interpreted, means only such as had been born to an exalted position in life and in an atmosphere of cultured and genteel society. The petted idol of the millionaire must not come in contact with common clay; she must be surrounded only by such influences as would tend to refine, elevate, and preserve the aristocratic and æsthetic principles which had always governed her life.

So the Chesters, Huntingtons, Carrols, and other scions from the fashionable world had received their perfumed notes bidding them to the merrymaking, and all mortals who were so unfortunate as to occupy an ordinary sphere in life were rigidly excluded.

But the little ones, as yet comparatively indifferent to the shackles of the fashionable world of which they were to become later slaves, appeared to be enjoying themselves very much after the manner of the "vulgar herd."

They shouted as lustily as the raggedest and most neglected street gamin of the city. They laughed as merrily and heartily as the humblest peasant. They romped like a troop of young Indians, and stuffed themselves with good things like veritable little gluttons and beggars.

Yet it was a pretty sight—those sweet little maidens, clad in their dainty robes, decked with bright, floating ribbons, with their merry, glancing eyes, rosy cheeks, and smiling lips, tripping lightly hither and thither, and followed by their eager, honest-faced young knights, the pride of many a fond father's heart, and who, even at that incipient age, were amusingly aping the gallantry of their elders.

One cannot behold anything more delightful than a company of happy children gathered around a temptingly spread table, with their bright, eager faces, their expectant eyes, as they rove hither and thither, making one wish himself again a child, with the keen appetite of youth.

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Every good thing of which children are so fond had been provided for little Miss Margaret's guests.

There were great, luscious strawberries, the first of the season, piled high and red in glittering cut-glass fruit dishes. There were little cakes and big cakes, and the birthday cake, with its pretty devices in frosting; there were bonbons and confectionery of all kinds; and last, but not of least importance, there was plenty of ice-cream in tempting cones of pink, and yellow, and brown, the simple sight of which made the little folks' mouths water.

How they did enjoy it all, every one of them! And how they made those good things disappear!

Oh, marvelous capacity of healthy, childish stomachs! And then, after all this, there was brought upon the board, with many smiles and an air of much mystery, a huge silver punch-bowl, filled to the brim with a strange-looking mixture, and decorated with tiny flags and wax candles—ten of each—the exact number of pretty Margaret Houghton's birthdays.

"Mamma, what is that?" cried the child, regarding the mysterious compound curiously with her great blue eyes.

"That, my darling, is a sawdust pudding," responded the lady, her face dimpling with amusement.

A shout of laughter and derision went up from the company about the table.

What mockery was this that would seek to tempt their surfeited desires with chips of wood and dust from the wooman's saw?

But if it did not appeal to their appetites, it certainly did to their curiosity, and the mirth subsided while the little ones sat still and awaited further developments with an eagerness there was no mistaking.

First the decorations were distributed—a flag to each lad, a candle to the little maidens—after which a servant prepared to serve the extraordinary contents of the huge punch-bowl.

A ladle was dipped into it, and a mass of clean, creamy sawdust was removed to a plate, when out rolled a ball of spotless cotton about the size of an apple.

Each child was served in this way, and then the fun began.

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With much laughter and jest the cotton balls were dissected, and each was found to contain some pretty gifts for its happy possessor to take away as a souvenir of the delightful occasion.

French bonbons were then distributed, snapped and unfolded, and merriment reigned while the little ones donned their fanciful caps and head-dresses, after which a procession was formed, and they marched forth into the grounds again, as grotesque and hilarious a troop as ever ran riot over a gentleman's premises.

Margaret Houghton led the mirthful train down the broad, circular avenue to the massive iron gate which shut her father's elegant estates away from the common world without.

But just here something attracted her attention which was to leave its impress upon her whole after life.

A boy, of perhaps twelve years, was standing outside the massive structure—a veritable little street gamin, barefooted, soiled, and illy clad, his hat, from which the brim was half-torn away, pushed back from his flushed and heated face, thus revealing masses of curling brown hair lying in moist rings upon his forehead, while his great wistful dark eyes were peering in between the bars of the gate at the group of happy children in their conical caps and holiday attire, with a look of longing and heart-hunger pitiful to behold.

The expression of his countenance betrayed that he felt the difference between himself and these things of "finer mold" who were shut away from him within those sacred precincts; the grieved look about his mouth, a sort of wondering sadness in his eyes, showed that he could not understand why life should be so full of hope and pleasure for them—so empty for him.

And why should it?

His face was as noble and handsome, his form as straight and manly, his limbs as strong and lithe, his mind, and heart, and capacity for enjoyment as large as theirs.

Ah! the magic aureole of gold had environed them with its mystic halo, thus assigning them a place inside,

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while he, dignified by no such glory, was destined to remain outside a certain pale of society.

"Hi! see! look at the little beggar!" cried a thoughtless urchin, as he too caught sight of the forlorn figure we have described.

"My! what a rag-bag!" piped a little miss, who was gorgeous in azure satin with real lace flounces, blue silk hose, and white kid boots.

"Here, I've got a switch—I'll send him about his business. Go away—we don't allow beggars at this party," shouted a coarse boy, and he advanced toward the gate as if to put his threat into execution.

But sweet Margaret Houghton sprang forward and laid her small hand upon his uplifted arm.

"No, no, Webster, you must not strike him; and you should not say such unkind things—he is a little boy just like you."

"Just like *me!* I guess not!" was the indignant retort to this assertion, while he drew his little form up proudly and flushed an angry crimson.

"I mean that he can hear, and see, and feel, just as you can, and you should not say or do anything to hurt him," the gentle child replied.

"Pooh!" was the contemptuous answer, while he cast a look of defiance at the intruder.

Margaret stepped nearer, pushing her impolite guest gently aside, her beautiful blue eyes looking troubled, her cheeks red as peaches, her manner kind and pitiful.

"Do you want anything, boy? What did you come here for?" she asked, in a kind tone.

The boy's eyes had blazed angrily at the rude words of the others, and his face had grown crimson with passion; but his color subsided, and the wrathful light died away, at the sweet tones and friendly words of the beautiful little girl before him.

"No; I don't want anything," he replied, bashfully, but regarding her wonderingly. "I only heard you having a good time in here, so I stopped to look for a minute."

The pathetic words moved the lovely child strangely. She *was* having a pleasant time within that earthly

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paradise, while he, poor being from an humbler sphere, could only stand outside and look upon it.

"Don't you ever have a good time like this?" she asked, half-sadly, half-curiously.

As if mentally contrasting their conditions, he glanced down at his bare, dusty feet, and over his untidy clothing, then at her dainty white dress, with its floating azure sash, her pretty bronze slippers, with their blue satin bows, then shook his head, and said, gravely:

"No."

"I'm sorry," Margaret replied, a little regretful sigh escaping her red lips. "This is my birthday!" she exclaimed. "I'm ten years old to-day, and I'm having a party. I think I never had such a good time before, and I wish everybody could be in it," she concluded, wistfully, her earnest blue eyes gazing sorrowfully into those brown ones on the other side of the gate. "Stay here a minute till I come again," she added, in a quick whisper; then she turned abruptly away.

"Come," she said to her companions, "let us go back to the tent and have a game of 'blind man's buff!'" and speeding down the avenue, they followed, leaving the poor boy still standing there, watching their retreating forms, and vainly trying, as many others have done, to solve the perplexing question, why some people were always "in" and others always "out."

Before five minutes had passed, little Margaret came flying down the drive-way again.

She had slipped away, unobserved by her company, and had come back there with a strange purpose in her young heart.

She found the lad still standing where she had left him.

"Boy," she said, gently, pressing her sweet face close to the iron bars, "I wanted to give you something; that was why I told you to stay. Mamma made such fun for us to-day," she went on to explain, "with a sawdust pudding and funny little cotton puffs like dumplings in it—not a pudding to eat, you know; only for sport. There was something nice in our cotton balls for every one. This came in mine, and I am going to give it to you. It

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is a little gold dollar, and there is a hole and ring in it to fasten it to a chain. Perhaps you haven't got any chain," with a doubtful glance at the forlorn figure confronting her, "but if you like to keep it, maybe you can put a string through it."

She slipped her hand, in which there gleamed a bright new coin, through the gate, and held it toward him.

His eyes lighted as he beheld it, but he drew back slightly without offering to take her gift.

"Your ma won't like it," he said, briefly.

"She won't care. I've got lots of presents—lovely ones, too; and I want you to have this;" and she dropped it just at his feet.

He stooped and picked it up, his face aglow.

"I never had anything so pretty before," he said, his eyes devouring its yellow brightness.

"What's your name?" Margaret asked.

"Louis."

"Louis what?"

"Louis Dunbar."

"That's a nice name. How old are you?"

"Twelve."

"Why, you're two years older than I. I'm ten to-day," with an air of pride and as if she loved to say it.

"Do you like ice-cream?" she asked, changing the subject.

He gave a queer little laugh.

"It looks nice, but I never had any."

"Didn't you?" she said, with grave, pitiful eyes. "Well, wouldn't you like some of my birthday cream?"

The boy nodded bashfully, but looked doubtful as to the propriety of accepting her offer.

"Well," the child returned, eagerly, "you go to that side gate down there, and I'll take you round to the kitchen and give you some. You shall have a piece of my cake, too."

She turned, as she spoke, toward the spot to which she had directed him, and was at the gate before him, opening it with her own hands for him to enter.

Then, leading the way, she took him by a side path through the grounds, and finally came up before a rear

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door of the elegant mansion which was her home.

"Mary," she said to a servant, who was standing within the kitchen, "get this boy some ice-cream, a piece of cake and strawberries and some of the other good things, too."

"Oh, Miss Margie!" cried the girl, in disgust, as she caught sight of her strange companion, "what would your mamma say to see you in such company? and as for feeding the likes o' that with ice-cream and strawberries —ha, ha! I'd better get him some bread and butter."

The child turned crimson at the girl's rudeness.

"I am to do whatever I please to-day, because it is my birthday—mamma said so—and you are to give this boy what I tell you," she returned, imperiously, and emphasizing her command with a stamp of her pretty little foot.

The girl laughed again, but turned good-naturedly to do her bidding, and soon made her appearance again, bearing a small tray covered with a snowy napkin, upon which there was a tempting array of dainties such as had never before gladdened the heart of the poor little waif to whom they were presented.

"There, now, Louis Dunbar, eat all you like," commanded little Miss Houghton, smiling to see the look of genuine delight on his flushed face; and waiting for no second bidding, her strange guest fell to with a will, and disposed of his rare feast with a relish that was beautiful to behold.

Margaret stood by meanwhile entertaining him with an account of the day's amusements and pleasures, and feeling happier over his enjoyment than over the hosts of beautiful gifts she had received.

"I never had anything so nice before in my life," Louis said, as the last strawberry and morsel of cake disappeared from view; "you have been very good to me, but——"

"But what?" asked his little hostess, as he hesitated and looked perplexed; "do you want some more?"

"Oh, no; but I wonder what makes some folks so different from others."

"How different?"

"Why, like you and me," he replied, pointing at her,

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then at himself. "Why do you have everything that is nice and pretty, while I never can have anything?"

A puzzled expression stole over the child's beautiful face.

"I suppose it is because my papa is rich and—yours is poor," she answered, hesitatingly, after a moment's thought.

"I haven't any father," returned the boy, briefly.

"Poor boy!" the child said, softly, "then your mother must be very poor."

"I haven't any mother, either," was the pathetic response to this.

"Oh, where do you live, then?—who takes care of you?"

The child's voice trembled and there were tears in her blue eyes as she realized for the moment something of his forlorn condition.

"I live with John Jones—he took me when mother died," and the boy's lip quivered over those last sad words, "when mother died."

"He's as poor as he can be," he went on; "and he's got three boys of his own besides me, so of course I don't expect *very* much."

"Don't they have nice things to eat and good clothes to wear?" Margie asked, sadly.

"No, we all fare about alike. "But," he continued, after a moment of grave reflection, "when I grow to be a man *I* will be rich, and have everything nice like this," glancing about the beautiful place, "and then I'll pay you back for being so good to me to-day.

He doffed his cap as he spoke, and made her a bashful bow; then, turning, he darted away with the speed of the wind, and was soon lost to sight among the trees, while little Margaret Houghton went gravely back to her young guests, musing upon a problem that has puzzled many an older and wiser head than hers—namely, the inequalities of life and their causes.

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## CHAPTER II.

### A BOY'S RESOLUTION.

Louis Dunbar had lived in the city all his life, and was a veritable street arab. Young as he was, he knew almost every nook and corner in the great metropolis, while not infrequently he made exploring expeditions into the suburbs and surrounding country.

On the day mentioned in the previous chapter he had wandered from the noisy, dusty town in an aimless sort of way, a desire for the sight of green grass, bright flowers, and waving trees—a longing for the sound of lowing of cattle, the song of birds, and the hum of insect life, taking possession of his heart, and thus it was he had strayed to the gates of Wallace Houghton's elegant estate, and become the guest of the wealthy gentleman's daughter.

He was a poor, neglected waif whose mother had died very suddenly when he was but six months old, and of whose father no one seemed to know anything. He would have been consigned to the questionable mercies of an orphan's home or an alms-house but for the good-nature and kindness of an humble woman, who, being childless at that time, had felt her heart go out toward the motherless boy, and had taken him into her home and given him such care and attention as she could bestow.

Had any one observed him as he trudged back toward the city after the rare pleasure and treat which he had enjoyed at the birthday party, he would have been impressed by the expression of gravity and resolution on his young face.

Reaching the city, he finally turned into a narrow alley in a poor locality, and climbed a somewhat dilapidated outside stairway leading into an humble dwelling.

Opening a door, on reaching the top, and entering, he was greeted by the shouts of noisy children, the steam of boiling clothes and the fumes of meat and vegetables, while a stout, red-faced woman looked up from the wash-tub over which she was bending, and recognized him with a nod and a weary smile.

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Poor Mary Jones! She had led a hard life during the last few years.

John Jones, her husband, worked in the foundry near by, and when they were first married he was able to provide quite comfortably for himself and wife.

But he was one of those easy-going fellows, with no push or energy, satisfied with his scant earnings as long as he had enough to eat and drink, or if not really satisfied, too indolent or indifferent to bestir himself and find something better to do to improve his condition, so when added cares came in the form of little ones of their own, his wife had to put her shoulder to the wheel, and by taking in fine washing and ironing, not infrequently earned more than her husband, besides performing her own heavy home duties.

But hard times and sickness kept them poor in spite of all this, and though the mother often sighed to have her children, and the boy to whom she had given a home, and whom she loved almost as well, go poorly fed and scantily clothed, yet she seemed powerless to help it.

"Where have you been, Louis?" she asked, as the boy entered his humble home, caught up the youngest child in his arms, and gave him a toss in the air, greatly to the infant's delight.

He set the little one down, threw his apology of a hat upon the table, and, running his sunburnt fingers through the masses of dark hair upon his forehead, while a roguish twinkling beamed in his eyes, he replied:

"Been to a party, Aunt Mary."

"What?" demanded the woman, somewhat sharply.

"I have, 'pon my word—out on the Brookline road, too—to one of them crack places; and I had ice cream, strawberries, and cake with the cutest little gimcracks on top you ever saw," and the lad smacked his lips over the remembrance of those rare dainties upon which he had feasted with such gusto.

"Stop your fooling, Louis, and talk sense," returned the woman, gravely, while she bestowed a questioning glance upon him as if she feared he'd been up to some mischief that might get him into trouble.

"Truly, Aunt Mary, I'm not fooling," he answered,

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and then he told the story of his adventure, greatly to the entertainment of all his listeners.

One thing, however, he did not mention, and that was the gift he had received.

He feared that his Aunt Mary would tell him he ought to give the money to her for the comfort of the family, and that he did not want to do.

It was not because of the value of the money, but because of the giver, that he wished to keep it.

Her touch, and the kindness that had prompted its bestowal, had rendered it sacred to him, and he had mentally resolved that he would keep it just as long as he lived.

His story told, he fell to musing again, and sat for a long time without speaking to any one.

But later in the evening, after they had had their simple supper, when John Jones had taken his pipe and gone out for a social smoke with one of his cronies, and the little ones were all in bed, he suddenly burst out with:

"Why ain't everybody rich, Aunt Mary?"

The woman was standing at the table ironing some fine, beautifully trimmed clothes belonging to a wealthy lady for whom she worked, and perchance something of the same thought was in her mind, for she heaved a deep sigh, set down the iron with a heavy thud, and gave vent to a short, bitter laugh.

"It takes smart folks to get rich," she said, sharply; "folks who are always on the lookout for the best chances, and who are willing to turn their hand to whatever comes along when it's hard times, instead of standing around on the corners, with their hands in their pockets, and wondering 'when work will begin.' I wish I was a man," she concluded with an energy which betrayed she was feeling deeply on the subject.

"What would you do if you *were* a man, Aunt Mary?" Louis asked, eagerly.

The woman's face flushed a burning red, and a quick sob heaved her chest. She was thinking of those children at Margaret Houghton's party whom Louis had described in such glowing terms to her.

"I'd—never be content to settle down on a dollar or a

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dollar and a half a day, and let my children"—with a troubled glance at the boy's poverty-stricken appearance, and a wistful look toward the room where her own little ones were sleeping—"go anyhow, and my wife stand six or eight hours a day at a washtub to help support them."

"But what if you couldn't get more than that?"

"I *would* get more than that; how do you suppose the rich get rich? Some are 'born with a silver spoon in their mouth,' I know, but more make their own money, and have to begin on little, too. I suppose I'd take the dollar to begin with, but I'd keep my eyes open, and instead of walking about the streets with a dirty pipe in my mouth, or gossiping at a corner grocery, I'd look about me, after my day's work was done, for something better, and—I'd have it, too."

"But don't you suppose the men are tired after working all day in the foundry?" questioned Louis, well knowing that she was referring to her husband.

"Tired? I suppose they are; but don't you suppose a woman gets tired, too?" demanded Mary Jones, bitterly; "and yet, instead of sitting down with folded hands to rest, or going to her neighbor's to gad after she has done her day's work for a family of six, she can stand at a washtub, or an ironing table, half the night, and earn as much, if not more, than her husband has earned all day; while he, poor soul! thinks he can't do a few chores about the house to help her after his ten hours' task is done. I know scores of women who drudge sixteen hours out of every twenty-four, and half support their families, and yet their husbands grumble if they are asked to split a few kindlings, sift a little ashes, or mind the baby for half an hour."

"I'm sorry, Aunt Mary, that you have to work so hard," Louis said, regarding her tired face regretfully. "I wish you hadn't quite so many to work for."

The woman gave him a sharp, questioning look.

"La, child! I didn't mean to complain—the Lord knows there are harder lots than mine—only it seems to me sometimes, that if I was a man, well and strong, I'd want to be as smart as anybody else. I'd hate to see my children looking like little beggars, and my wife working

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her fingers to the bone, when perhaps my neighbors were tidy, and thrifty, and happy, and perhaps laying by a snug penny for a rainy day.

"I'm glad my children are all boys," she went on, after a few moments of silence, during which she had been plying the iron vigorously, every stroke seeming to speak of regret over hopes unfulfilled. "I'd feel bad to have a girl grow up to have three or four children of her own, and have to do both man's and woman's work to keep the breath of life in them, and then not half live, either. Before I was married I used to think what a nice home I'd have when John and I got settled; what pretty things I'd make for it and my children; how neat and tidy they should look when I sent them to school, and how, perhaps, I'd get time now and then to read a nice book myself; but, deary me! it has taken me every blessed minute to earn enough to keep them from going hungry, and I suppose I've got to drag on to the end in the same way."

A heavy sigh concluded the pathetic sentence, and, as she turned to the stove to exchange her iron, she slyly wiped a tear from her eye with the corner of her apron.

Louis saw it, however.

"I wish *I* was a man this minute, and I'd earn something to help you, Aunt Mary," he said, looking up at her with a flushed face and sad yet eager eyes.

"You've always been a good boy, Louis, and I wish I could have done better by you, for your mother was a little lady, if there ever was one," she replied, earnestly.

"Do you suppose I've got any relations anywhere?" the lad questioned, after another thoughtful silence.

"Goodness only knows, child. All *I* know about you is that your poor mother came here when you were three or four months old. She was a pretty little thing, but sickly looking. She hired one room of me, and always paid the rent promptly, but where she got the money, or how she ever lived, is more than I can tell. She had a dreadful cough, and grew weaker and weaker every day, though I used to take her up a bite to tempt her appetite now and then when we had something nice, which we often did in those days. But, three months from the day

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she came here, I went in to see her in the morning and found her dead in her bed, and you sleeping as sound as a top beside her. She had burst a blood vessel in the night while coughing, and died all by herself, with no one to do her a kind turn."

The child never moved as he listened to this sad story, but great tears gathered in his dark eyes and rolled down his flushed cheeks.

He had heard something of this story before, though not quite as many of the details.

"She had a little money in an old wallet," Mary Jones resumed, "besides a gold chain and a beautiful ring with a great pearl in it. I had to sell those, though, to get money enough to bury her. She hadn't any clothes to speak of, and was about as poor as any one could well be. I thought I should find something to tell me who she was, but there wasn't a letter or a scrap of anything to show that she had a friend in the world. There was only her wedding ring and a little book of poetry, with her name, 'Annie,' and a verse underneath, written in a nice gentlemanly hand, and signed 'A——,' to tell that she ever belonged to anybody. I hadn't the heart to sell *that* ring, for I thought you'd value it if you lived to grow up."

"Have you the book of poetry now, Aunt Mary?" Louis asked, wiping the tears from his face with the sleeve of his jacket.

"Yes, I put it away with the ring."

"May I look at it?"

The boy's voice trembled and his lips quivered as he made his request.

The woman set down her iron, and going to a bureau that stood in a corner of the room, unlocked a drawer and took from it a small box.

This she brought and handed to the child.

He reverently opened the box.

A small volume of Tennyson's poems, bound in blue and gold, lay within it, together with another very small box.

He took out the book and opened it at the fly-leaf, and read there, penned in clear, beautiful characters:

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"ANNIE:

"Whatever lot be mine,
Long and happy days be thine,
Ere thy full and honored age
Dates of time its latest page. A."

That simple initial, with the pen-picture of a tiny dove underneath, was all the signature there was to that fond wish.

Young and unlearned as he was, hardly able to read the writing, he could not understand the full meaning of those tender lines; but he instinctively felt as if a loving hand had penned them, and that "A.," whoever he or she might have been, must have loved his mother well.

In the back of the book there were a few quoted lines, written in a delicate hand, and signed "Annie," and his young heart thrilled as he recognized the fact that if he possessed nothing else he at least had a bit of his mother's handwriting.

He slowly turned those gilt-edged leaves, and his little face grew solemn and tender as he thought of those white hands which once had turned the same pages, now lying folded and cold in death.

He closed the book after a while, and laid it tenderly back in the box, and then opened that other smaller one.

It contained his mother's wedding ring—a small, heavy hoop of gold with simply the date of her marriage engraven on its inner surface. This, also, after a little while, he reverently replaced in the box.

"Do you suppose 'A.' was my father?" he asked at last, a perplexed, almost distressed look in his dark eyes.

"Bless you! I don't know any more than you do," returned Mrs. Jones, who had been closely observing him. "Your mother never told me anything about herself. I suppose she hadn't any idea that she was going to die so soon, poor thing. If she had she might have said something about you and left some word telling what she wanted done with you. As I told you before, she was a pretty little thing, and as sweet in her ways as could be, while you were as fine a baby boy as ever the sun shone on, and it is a pity, if your father was living, that he couldn't have had you. My own children hadn't come

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then, or I suppose I should have thought I had enough to care for, but I hadn't the heart to send you to the asylum, and John got better wages then. I had a carpet on the floor then, and pretty curtains at the windows, and we were very comfortable. I've kept on growing fonder of you all the time, and you've been a help to me in taking care of the children. I'm only sorry I couldn't have done better by you," she concluded, sorrowfully.

"You've been very good to me, Aunt Mary, and I'll pay you for it some time. I won't be a poor boy always —I'll make something yet. If there are chances in the world for others, I guess there is one for me somewhere —I'll find it, and then I'll make the most of it," said Louis Dunbar, with a resolution not common in one so young. "It's rather hard," he went on, musingly, "not to know really who you are nor who your father was. Perhaps I have relations somewhere who would be glad to help me up if they knew about me. But I'll see what I can do for myself, and I bet I will have a pile of money some time, and then I shan't let you work as hard as you do now, Aunt Mary."

Mrs. Jones laughed good-naturedly over these bright visions of youth—frail air-castles that soon would crumble and fall.

"I hope you won't be disappointed," she said, adding, with the old bitterness in her voice: "But whatever you do, don't ever ask a girl to marry you until you are sure you can take care of her. Better stay single all your life than make a drudge of your wife and let your children come up anyhow."

"I won't," was the eager reply. "If I ever want a wife, I'll get a house first to put her in—a nice one, too—and money ahead to help take care of her. May I keep these now?" he asked, after a moment, holding up the box she had given him. "I'd like to, and look at them by myself once in a while."

"If I thought you wouldn't loose them," Mrs. Jones began, reflectively.

"I won't," Louis interrupted. "I have a box that locks, you know. I'll put them in that and be just as careful as I can of them."

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"Yes, you may have them," said Mary Jones.

And, bidding her good-night, the boy crept away to his little loft above the hot kitchen, where, after storing his treasures safely away in the little "box that locked," he threw himself upon his bed, and was soon fast asleep and dreaming that a graceful figure, with a sweet, fair face, came and bent fondly over him, and that, reaching up his arms, he placed them about her neck and called her "mother."

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## CHAPTER III.

### LOUIS FINDS EMPLOYMENT.

Early the next morning—long before the sun had risen—Louis Dunbar was awake.

Very quietly he stole out of bed, his face very grave, and thoughtful, and resolute, and hastily dressing himself, slipped noiselessly down to the kitchen, where, after procuring himself a piece of bread and meat from a closet, he softly let himself out of the house.

He turned his steps toward the outskirts of the city, and walking on, and on, was five miles from the busy town when the clocks upon its many steeples struck the hour of six.

Louis seemed to have some definite plan in view, for he kept straight upon the highway until he came to a large farm-house—a thrifty-looking place, white-coated, green-blinded, with great, beautiful elms drooping gracefully all about the smoothly shaven lawn.

Going around to a back door, the boy unhesitatingly approached it and rapped, though somewhat timidly, upon it.

It was opened almost instantly by a buxom, rosy-cheeked girl, who regarded him with something of astonishment in her bright eyes.

"Does Mr. Brown live here?" Louis asked, respectfully.

"Yes," the girl answered, still eyeing him curiously.

"He hires boys to pick strawberries, don't he?"

"Yes; lots of them."

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"Would he give me a job?"

"I don't know; you can ask him," the girl replied, in a kind tone.

"Mr. Brown," she called into the kitchen; "here's a boy to see you; he wants a job."

Then she went back to her work, leaving Louis standing alone upon the broad stone step outside.

The farmer soon made his appearance, however, and, doffing his tattered straw hat, Louis asked him if he would hire him to pick berries.

"Who are you?" the man asked, bluntly, and studying him attentively with his keen eyes.

"My name's Louis Dunbar."

"Where do you come from?"

"Boston. I live with Mrs. Jones; but she's poor, and —and I want to do something to help her—and myself, too."

The farmer regarded him curiously.

"How did you get here so early this morning?" Mr. Brown inquired.

"Walked. I got up before four o'clock."

"Had any breakfast?"

"Yes, sir."

But the boy hung his head and blushed now, ashamed to own how simple and insufficient his breakfast had really been, while the fumes of fragrant coffee, fried potatoes and other appetizing odors from the kitchen made his heart and stomach yearn as only a hungry boy's can.

"So you want to pick strawberries for a living, do you?" said Farmer Brown, musingly. "Ever tried it?"

"No, sir."

"How much do you expect to get a box?"

"I don't know, sir. I didn't know how you paid."

"I give two cents a box."

"Well, even if I couldn't pick more'n a dozen boxes, it would help a little," Louis returned, earnestly.

The farmer smiled.

"I guess I shall give you a job," he remarked; "but if you have walked five miles, you'll need something to stay your stomach till dinner time. Come in and have a bite."

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"I'm afraid I shall not earn enough for that, and," began Louis, doubtfully, "I'm not very hungry."

But he shot a hungry and expressive glance toward the direction whence those tempting odors came.

"Nonsense, boy," retorted the farmer. "Here, Sarah," turning to the girl within, "take this child to the men's table; make him eat a good, hearty breakfast, then send him into the strawberry field with John, and tell him to set him at work."

He laid his hand kindly on the boy's shoulder as he spoke, and gently forced him into the clean, roomy kitchen, toward the table already laid for the morning meal. Louis Dunbar had never had such a breakfast before.

There was a good, juicy steak, with some of those fragrant fried potatoes, hot biscuits, light as a feather, a glass of delicious milk, and a generous dish of red, luscious strawberries.

Truly times were looking up for the poor little street arab, that he should have two such red-letter days in succession.

Before he had finished eating, the girl who had answered his knock at the door came and laid a partly worn broad-brimmed straw hat down beside him.

"You can't pick berries all day in the broiling sun with this thing," she said, taking up the wreck that he had worn, "so you are to wear this."

Louis thanked her, and wondered if all country folk were as kind-hearted and generous as these people.

Breakfast over, he followed John to the berry field, where he found a company of boys and girls of all ages busy at work, and where great, red, fragrant berries lay gleaming beneath their rich, green leaves waiting, most temptingly, for nimble fingers to gather them.

Louis was provided with some boxes, allotted some rows to pick and then bent himself to his task with a will which betrayed that he really meant business. So diligently did he work that by noon he had filled twenty boxes.

"Pretty well done for the first trial," said Farmer Brown, coming around just as the horn at his house was

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blowing for dinner to see how his new hand was getting on; "and," he added, "your baskets look full as well as those of the old pickers. But it is dinner time now. Come."

He turned away without saying more, and Louis, feeling as if his assertion and invitation had been a command, followed him to the house, where he found a dinner as bountiful and appetizing as the breakfast had been, awaiting him.

He hurried through it, and then back to the field to work again, and when six o'clock came he had added twenty-five boxes to the twenty of the morning.

Forty-five boxes, at two cents a box, made ninety cents. Excepting the gold dollar which little Margaret Houghton had given him the previous day, Louis Dunbar had never before had so much money at one time.

When he went up to the shanty where the baskets were collected and packed into crates, to receive his money from Farmer Brown, and the sum was counted out to him, he flushed a vivid crimson and drew back.

"Please, sir, it does not all belong to me," he said. "I've had my breakfast and dinner, you know."

"Yes, and you're going to have some supper, too, my lad," returned the man, good-naturedly. "Take the money, child; you've earned it fast enough; that five-mile walk was worth something, and you have done your work well besides. What do you say to staying through the season with me?"

The man had watched the boy closely all day. He liked his looks and quiet ways, and felt much interested in him.

"May I?" cried Louis, eagerly. "How long will it be?"

"Four or five weeks. You could earn considerable in that time, at the rate you have worked to-day."

"But I should have to go home to-night and tell Aunt Mary about it. She would worry if I should stay away without letting her know where I was. I could come out early to-morrow morning again, though."

"Very well; we are going to send a team in to-night with a load of berries, so you can ride if you like."

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The boy, of course, was glad that he had not those five long miles to walk again, for his legs and back ached with their unaccustomed labor that day, and his face shone with delight as he pocketed his ninety cents, at the prospect of earning as much, if not more, every day for the next four or five weeks.

After supper he followed the men into the great barn, and made himself so useful there about the chores, while the market wagon was being loaded, that he won their good will at the very outset.

Then the ride back into the city in the cool of the evening was delicious; but the best of all was telling kind Mrs. Jones of his day's experience, and then putting the money that he had earned into the hard, red hand that had done so much for him for so many years.

The woman almost cried over the boy's energy and thoughtfulness.

"No, no, Louis; I can't take it. To think you should have walked five miles and then worked all day!" she said, brokenly.

"But I've lived on you long enough, Aunt Mary. I'm going to do something for myself now," Louis said, gravely.

"Bless the boy! Well, I'll take the money, but I don't begrudge what I've done for you. You can go to Mr. Brown, if you like; I don't doubt you'll fare far better than here, though I shall miss you, Louis," and she covertly brushed a regretful tear from her cheek as she gave her sanction to his project.

So, the next morning early Louis trudged back to the farm, and felt himself almost a man to be "hired for the season" and to be able to support himself.

During the next five weeks he averaged fifty boxes a day, while every day, before breakfast and after supper, he made himself so useful about the farm that everybody pronounced him "a capital little fellow, so smart and helpful."

Three mornings of the week he helped Sarah to churn, besides performing many other little services, which, of course, recommended him to her favor at once. Then he rinsed out the milk cans, helped to feed the horses and

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pigs, and drove the cows home from pasture every evening.

All this was a perfect delight to the poor child who had been shut in the great, gloomy city all his life, and he just reveled in the country air and living.

But the last of the strawberries were sent to market one morning, and when evening came Farmer Brown called Louis to him and put twenty-five dollars into his plump brown hands, saying:

"There, my boy, that is what you have earned, taking out the shoes and jacket I bought for you; and, I must say, if you belonged to me I should be proud of you. You have worked like a little beaver."

Twenty-five dollars in new, crisp greenbacks!

Louis Dunbar looked dazed as he slowly counted it over.

He could not realize that he had earned it all. It seemed like a fortune to him.

"But—I've lived here all the time; part of it ought to go for that," he said at last, when he could find the use of his tongue.

"No, no, lad; you've earned your board besides, for you have always helped me to pack the boxes in the crates, to say nothing of all the chores you've done. And now, if you are agreeable, I'd like to make another bargain with you," concluded the farmer, in a business-like tone.

The boy's eyes sparkled as he looked up eagerly into his kind employer's face. The word "bargain" had a most musical sound to his young ears.

"You see," pursued Mr. Brown, "the raspberry season follows the strawberries; then come blueberries, huckleberries and blackberries. Well, I raise all kinds for the market, and it will take through August to get done with them all. You are about the nimblest urchin with your fingers that I ever saw, and if you want to stay with me I'll give you three dollars a week and your board for what you can do from six o'clock in the morning till six at night, with an hour's nooning out, of course. Then, if you want to work for yourself, I'll give you all you can pick over and above that time, and you may sell them

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on your own account. How is it?—do you want to stay?"

"Yes, sir," promptly responded Louis, while his heart bounded with delight at those words, "pick and sell on your own account."

That seemed like doing real business for himself, and he resolved to do his level best.

During the next six weeks he was as busy as a bee. Up with the lark, helping the girls about the house and the men at the barn with a good nature and earnestness that won every heart; then, after breakfast, doing his best at the berries until noon. After eating his dinner he would throw himself down in the shade of some tree and catch a short nap; then up and at his berries again until six.

After supper he would pick like a spirit for himself as long as he could see, then creep into his bed, tired through and through, but feeling like a young prince, with his capital slowly but surely growing under his efforts.

He managed to gather from three to five boxes daily for himself, and for these he realized from ten to fifteen cents per box, according to the fruit—raspberries and blackberries bringing more than other kinds.

Besides all this, he grew in favor constantly with good Farmer Brown and his wife, who helped him to more respectable clothing, and took pains to teach him many things of which poor Mary Jones knew nothing.

At the end of August, Louis had more than fifty dollars laid by in Mr. Brown's keeping; but a portion of this he had resolved to give to the woman who had been so kind to him, to make, if possible, her burdens a little lighter.

"What are you going to do with yourself this fall and winter?" Mr. Brown asked him one day when they were packing the last of the blackberries off to the city.

"I don't know, sir," Louis replied, thoughtfully. "I had thought of stocking a nut and fruit stand somewhere in the city and trying to make a little money that way. I—I don't want to go back to live on Aunt Mary and do nothing."

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"A nut and fruit stand!—hum!" said Farmer Brown, gravely.

"I know two or three fellows who get their living that way," said Louis, flushing, for he saw that his employer did not approve the plan.

"How old are they?"

"Well, I suppose they *are* older than *I* am," he admitted, looking still more confused.

"Don't you like it out here on the farm?"

"Yes, sir, I like it very much. You have been very good to me, and I thank you," the boy said, heartily.

The farmer smiled, pleased by his appreciative answer. He was becoming very fond of the manly little fellow.

"If you were my boy," he said, "I should tell you I think you are not old enough to go into the city and set up for yourself. You would be sure to be imposed upon, and—well, there are a good many reasons why I don't approve of it. Suppose you stay with me for a while longer; there are the grapes coming on, and it is almost as much work to gather them for the market as it was the strawberries. After that will come the pears, apples and other harvesting, which will keep us busy until into November. Then I shall send off the most of my men; but I am going to need a boy to do chores about the house and barn, and you could go to school through the winter if you chose. I will keep you at the same price I have been paying you through the harvesting, then I will give you a dollar a week and let you go to school during the winter; a boy like you ought to be learning as well as earning something."

Louis did not make any reply for several minutes; but at last he said:

"I'd like it through the harvesting, but I'd like to be earning more through the winter if I could. I—I want to get rich, sir."

The confession was made with a conscious blush, however, as if somehow he felt it was not the worthiest ambition in the world.

"Yes, I see you are very eager to make money," his employer returned, looking very grave; "but simply to get rich is not the most desirable thing in life, and a rich

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man cannot thoroughly enjoy wealth unless his mind is cultivated and he learns how to use it rightly. You need wisdom, my boy—you should first get a good practical education, and that will help you greatly in obtaining just what you desire. Did you ever go to school?"

"Not very much, sir. I've had to take care of the children a good deal while Aunt Mary washed and ironed."

"Do you like to study?"

"I'm afraid I don't, sir, very well," Louis humbly confessed.

"I infer you haven't had taste enough of it to make you like it," observed the farmer, adding: "We've got a first-class graded school down at the village, and it will do you good to go there. I reckon you'd better stay with me this winter."

"I guess you are right, sir," Louis returned, after a little reflection. "I will; and I think you are very good' to take so much interest in me."

"That chap will make a smart man if he's only led right," soliloquized the farmer, well pleased with the result of the conversation; " 'twould be a pity to have him go back to the city and into the kind of life he led before coming here. I'll do what I can for him."

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## CHAPTER IV.

### A QUARREL AND ITS RESULTS.

At first Louis Dunbar did not seem very enthusiastic over acquiring an education, and if any one could have analyzed his feelings it would have been to discover that he looked forward to the months which he would spend at school almost as so much lost time.

But he had not been in the harness a fortnight before he became deeply interested in his lessons; a thirst for knowledge was created within him, and he applied himself to his tasks with the same zest and ambition that he had manifested in acquiring money.

But it was not to be all smooth sailing for our young

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hero; he was destined to meet trial and opposition in the way.

Among his schoolmates there was a lad about two years older than himself—Arthur Aspinwall by name, and a son of an ex-judge and the great man of the town—and a spirit of antagonism and dislike was engendered between the two boys during the very first of the term.

Arthur was a bright, handsome-looking boy, with large, hazel eyes, dark hair and rosy cheeks, but was exceedingly dull at his books, which accounted for his being in the class to which Louis was admitted.

He was always very richly and tastefully dressed, wore a gold watch and chain, to which several charms and coins were attached, and never lacked for spending money.

But he possessed the disposition of a bully, and often, by virtue of an imagined superiority on account of his wealth and position, tyrannized over boys younger than himself, much to his own amusement, though greatly to their discomfort.

When Louis entered the school he at once turned his attention to him, and appeared to imagine that he had an unlimited license to insult and abuse him whenever he chose on account of his poverty and friendlessness.

"Hulloa, there, you nobody!" he cried out to him one day at recess. "Give us the address of your tailor. He ought to have taken an extra reef in those trouserloons of yours. I should imagine they'd been cut for your grandfather."

Louis Dunbar turned a livid scarlet at this coarse joke, which was greeted with a shout of merriment by the other boys.

He knew that his clothes did not fit him, and the fact had made him very uncomfortable from the first; but good Mrs. Brown had done the best she could to make him presentable at school by making over a suit of her husband's for him, and though the cloth was fine and nice, and no fault could be found as to neatness of finish, yet as to cut they certainly were not artistic, and the fit would never have made the reputation of a novice in the tailoring trade. But the boy was grateful to her for all

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that, and he would have suffered a good deal more than he did rather than have had her feelings hurt by calling in question her accomplishments as a tailoress.

He made no reply, however, to Arthur Aspinwall's rude sally, but, after that one vivid blush and an angry flash from his dark eyes, he instantly gained his self-possession, coolly slipped his hands into the pockets of those offending "trouserloons," and leisurely turned his back upon his tormentor.

"Impudence!" exclaimed the judge's son, nettled by his apparent indifference; then added, authoritatively: "I say, Dunbar, look here."

Louis instantly turned about and looked the boy full in the face.

"Why don't you speak when you're spoken to?" demanded Arthur, arrogantly, and advancing pompously toward Louis.

"I am ready to answer any civil questions," he replied, quietly, but not at all abashed by the other's manner.

"Oh, you are? What do you call civil questions?" sneered the judge's son.

"Such as you would be willing to answer yourself," said Louis, promptly.

"Really! Hear him, boys—'such as *I* would answer *myself.*' He puts himself on an equality with *me!*" scoffed the young scion of aristocracy, drawing himself up proudly, and glancing about him with the air of a prince.

Louis still stood with his hands in his pockets, calmly regarding the bully, and apparently not in the least disconcerted by his remarks—a circumstance that nettled his opponent greatly.

He all at once burst into a coarse laugh.

"Well, we'll try your civility, then," he said, mockingly, and assuming a deferential air. "Will you have the kindness to inform me who made your clothes?"

Again that brilliant flush swept over the boy's face, but he quietly returned:

"Mrs. Brown made them."

"Oh, you employ a *woman* tailor, then! I've heard of men being dressmakers, but I never heard of a *woman*

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*tailor* before. I wonder what she gave a yard for the cloth; is it the very latest style out?" and he gingerly took up one corner of Louis' mottled jacket to examine it, while the boys around set up another shout.

Louis' dark eyes flashed ominously, but he restrained his anger and replied composedly, and with a moral courage that would have done credit to an older person:

"You know very well that they are a suit of Mr. Brown's that his wife made over for me, and I am not ashamed to own it, or have any one know how kind they have both been to me."

"Bully for you, Louis Dunbar!" cried a voice among the crowd, and a boy about his own age and size stepped over to his side, his bright young face all aglow with admiration for his schoolmate's courage and independence.

"Shut up, Whipple!" angrily interposed Arthur Aspinwall. "Nobody asked you to interfere."

"I've a right to speak my mind if I choose. You're always bullying somebody, but I guess you've found your match this time, if you never did before," retorted the boy, spiritedly.

He was the son of a sea captain, and a favorite among his companions. He and his mother lived in a beautiful residence about a stone's throw from the schoolhouse, and they were supposed to be people of abundant means.

"My match in a beggar like him!" snapped Arthur, derisively.

"I am not a beggar, but *you* are no gentleman, to call such names," said Louis, with flashing eyes.

"What do *you* know about gentlemen, I wonder? Was your father one?" laughed the boy, rudely, but rapidly losing control of his temper.

"I hope so."

"You hope so! Don't you *know?*"

"I do not remember my father," responded Louis, sadly, and with a long-drawn sigh.

"Aha! I'll bet you never even saw him," said Aspinwall, with a malicious chuckle.

"No, I never saw him to know him," Louis responded, innocently.

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"How about your mother? She was a lady, I suppose?"

"Yes, she *was* a lady!" was the proud reply, and the boy felt as sure of what he asserted as if his mother stood there beside him to prove it.

"Oh! his mother, boys, was a lady; but his father, it seems, was a somewhat doubtful character. Fine parties we are getting into our school, aren't we?" said Arthur, with an insulting laugh, and an emphasis there was no mistaking.

For an instant Louis was tempted to dash at his tormentor and deal an angry blow upon the lips that had uttered such hateful words, but he restrained himself with an effort, though his hands were clenched until his nails were purple; for, chancing to glance toward the schoolhouse, he saw the master was standing in the doorway, quietly observing the scene.

But he could not entirely ignore the insult.

"Arthur Aspinwall, you may be the son of a judge and a rich man, but you'll *never* be a gentleman!" he said, with an accent of such stinging scorn that the lad lost control of himself entirely, and, darting forward, he angrily struck Louis' cap from his head.

"Take that for your insolence, you young upstart!" he roared, passionately.

That figure in the doorway never moved, but Louis could see that the master's face had grown very stern. He stooped and picked up his fallen cap, brushed the dust from it and replaced it upon his head.

"You had better not try that again!" he said, with forced composure.

The words were hardly out of his mouth before his antagonist had knocked it off again, and in doing so had hit the boy a rude blow on the head.

Human nature could bear no more, even if a hundred schoolmasters were looking on.

Louis Dunbar wheeled suddenly about, and almost before the judge's son could take breath after his exertion he was laid flat on his back in the dust.

This resolute act rather turned the tide of public opinion in Louis' favor.

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"Good for you, Dunbar!" shouted several voices, and the eager crowd gathered closer about the two boys.

Blind with passion and aching from his bruises, Arthur Aspinwall sprang to his feet and rushed again upon his opponent.

But again, and almost as dexterously as before, he was made to measure his length upon the ground, and this time he was thrown with such force that he roared lustily with pain.

Louis was not a quarrelsome boy, but when he was once aroused he was like a young lion for strength and agility.

He had not roamed the streets of Boston all his life and fought his way with the gamins there to no purpose.

He had learned many a trick at wrestling, and was quite a practiced athlete for one of his age.

He did not wait to ascertain whether his fallen foe was injured or not after his last exploit, but turned away and went toward the schoolhouse.

The master had disappeared from the doorway, but he felt sure that he had witnessed the whole transaction, and he expected a scene, and that he, a poor boy, would be shown no quarter for having dared to raise his hand against the son of a judge and the heir of the richest man in the village.

He walked directly into the schoolroom and took his seat at his desk. He was very white about the mouth, he breathed hard, and his great dark eyes burned like coals of fire, while he tried to brace himself for whatever might be in store for him.

When at length Arthur Aspinwall gathered himself up, his side and head bruised and aching from his fall, his clothing soiled and disarranged, his hair disheveled, he, too, rushed into the schoolroom and began to make his complaint, in a loud, angry tone.

"Go to your seat, sir," was the teacher's brief command, which interrupted him in the middle of it, and with a somewhat crestfallen air the youth obeyed, while the teacher rang his bell and called the school to order.

When all was quiet, he turned to Arthur again with a stern face.

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"Now, sir, I am ready to hear what you have to say," he remarked, but his tone was not strikingly encouraging.

Somewhat disconcerted by his manner, and that he should be called upon to state his case before the whole school, he grew confused, flushed deeply, and his eyes drooped with conscious shame.

"Dunbar knocked me down twice," he said.

"Louis Dunbar, stand up," commanded the master.

Louis arose and stood forth in the aisle.

"Now, Aspinwall, *you* may rise," and, wondering what was coming next, the boy obeyed.

The boys were not far from each other, and it was noticeable that Arthur was fully half a head taller than Louis, though the latter was stouter and more muscular in his makeup.

"How old are you, Aspinwall?" demanded Mr. Allen.

"Fourteen years and three months."

"What is *your* age, Dunbar?"

"I shall be thirteen years in a couple of weeks, sir."

"And *you* knocked Aspinwall down twice?"

"Yes, sir," assented the lad, his large eyes meeting his master's frankly, but growing very bright again. "And," he added, after a moment of hesitation, "I don't believe I could help doing it again, if he should provoke me in the same way. I—I knew you were looking, sir, and I held in as long as I could; but a fellow can't stand everything."

The master's lips twitched slightly at this ingenious confession, but he instantly controlled his amusement.

"Yes," he said, turning to Arthur, who looked surprised; "I *was* looking, as Louis says—I saw the whole proceeding. You were a bully and a coward, sir, to attack a boy younger than yourself, to say nothing of the insulting language that you used to him to begin with. I do not approve of fighting or knocking down, as a rule; but I must say that I cannot blame Dunbar in this instance, and think he defended himself as neatly and deftly as it ever was my lot to see any one do. He restrained himself longer than most boys would have done, and conducted himself in a right manly fashion. Aspinwall, you may be, as you are in the habit of boasting,

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the son and heir of a judge, but you will prove yourself a very unworthy one if you do not turn over a new leaf. You may both be seated, but let me neither see nor hear anything more of this."

Louis slipped into his seat, his face a deep crimson, but looking greatly relieved, and quietly took up his books. Arthur dropped heavily into his seat with a sulky air, shooting as he did so a glance of hate at his antagonist, while from that day he nursed a grudge against him and watched for an opportunity to be revenged upon him.

He could never forgive him for having come off conqueror in the contest, and much less for the public humiliation to which he had just been subjected by his indignant teacher.

The winter passed very quickly to Louis, who grew more and more interested in his studies as the weeks went by. He applied himself most industriously to his books and, of course, made rapid progress.

When spring came and he informed Mr. Allen that he should be obliged to leave school for another season on the farm, as he was still to remain with Mr. Brown, that gentleman manifested sincere regret.

"It is a pity," he said; "if I could only have you for the next few years I would make a thorough scholar of you."

"I am afraid I cannot afford to be a scholar, sir, for I have my own living to earn," Louis replied, but with a wistful glance at his books, which he had begun to love right well.

"Have you no friends who could aid you in getting an education?" asked Mr. Allen, thoughtfully.

"No, sir; none that I know of. I don't seem to belong to anybody," returned the boy, pathetically; "so I have to take care of myself. I wonder if I could do anything by trying to study by myself?"

"You might, if you do not have to work too hard on the farm; and, Louis, I shall be glad to lay out your lessons for you and hear you recite once or twice a week, if you can find the time for it."

"Thank you, sir; I'll try. I guess I can manage to do

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something at my books, at least until the very busy season comes on. I've just begun to know how useful knowledge is, and to want more of it."

And so for the present it was arranged that he should study as much as he could by himself and recite Wednesday and Saturday evenings to Mr. Allen.

Farmer Brown had grown really attached to the boy, and proposed that he should remain with him for another year upon the same terms as those of the preceding one.

Louis felt that it was a good offer, and unhesitatingly accepted it, and entered upon his work with the same eagerness that he had before shown.

He had proved himself so efficient and trustworthy that his employer placed great confidence in him, and during the berry season he often supervised the picking and packing of the fruit, and was even allowed at times to go in town to market with the team.

In this way he was able to dispose of his own berries more advantageously, the farmer still allowing him to pick for himself in his own time. Thus, when fall came again, he found himself possessor of more than a hundred and fifty dollars.

He began now to feel almost as if the farm was his home; he had grown very fond of Mr. and Mrs. Brown. while they treated him much as they would have treated their own son.

As the summer passed and the time for the fall term of school drew near, he found himself looking forward to it with pleasant anticipation. He had told Mr. Allen that he was coming back to him, much to that gentleman's gratification, for he felt sure that Louis Dunbar was no ordinary boy, and would well repay any efforts which he might put forth in his behalf.

But before entering school Louis went one day to Boston, with the farmer to advise him, and purchased a good, neatly fitting suit of clothes.

He felt that he could not again be subjected to the mortification of the previous winter; and, truly, when he appeared in his nobby apparel, there was not a boy in school who presented a better appearance.

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## CHAPTER V.

### THE ACCUSATION.

Arthur Aspinwall was also still a pupil in Mr. Allen's school, and this circumstance was the only really disagreeable feature of Louis' life at the present time.

The judge's son was more supercilious, if possible, than he had been the previous winter, and he took no pains to conceal the fact that his dislike, even hatred, of Louis had increased rather than abated.

One morning Louis hurried through his chores and started for school considerably earlier than usual.

There were some difficult problems in arithmetic to be solved that morning, and he had not yet succeeded in getting them right.

There was no one in the schoolroom when he reached it, and he bent himself to his task with a will that soon conquered all difficulties. Then, it being some time before the bell would ring, he fell into a fit of musing.

Among other things, his mind went back to that day of little Margaret Houghton's party, and her kindness to him. He wondered if he would ever see her again, and if she would remember him.

Almost unconsciously as he sat thus recalling that brightest experience of his life, he drew a black cord from his neck and began toying with a small gold coin that was attached to it.

So absorbed was he in his reflections that he did not hear the schoolroom door open, nor was he conscious of the presence of any one else until Arthur Aspinwall passed him with a stealthy step on his way to his own desk.

Their eyes met, and Louis colored and hastily concealed his precious coin with a half guilty air.

Arthur apparently took no notice of either him or his act, but his eyes glittered with a strange light, and there was a peculiar expression on his young face all the morning.

That afternoon he came in late, and Mr. Allen, who

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looked up as he entered, observed that he appeared flurried, and that his face wore an anxious expression.

He went directly to his desk—his master still watching him—bent down and looked within.

An expression of relief immediately replaced that of anxiety as he drew forth his watch and slipped it into his vest pocket. Then all at once he started, and began to examine his chain attentively.

The next moment he started straight for the teacher's desk with a very red face.

"Mr. Allen, was there any one in the room during intermission to-day?" he asked, with some excitement of manner.

"No one except Louis Dunbar. I have given him permission to remain here as he is obliged to stay at noon; why?"

"I left my watch here to-day; the bar that fastens the chain in my buttonhole broke this morning, and I slipped my watch into my desk, intending to take it to the jeweler and have it fixed this noon. But I forgot it, and now I find that some one has taken one of my charms, a gold dollar that my mother gave me one Christmas, four or five years ago. See!"

He held up the chain as he spoke, and Mr. Allen saw that something had evidently been wrenched from a tiny ring that was attached to it.

He remembered having seen a gold coin suspended there, and he looked very grave as he listened to the boy's complaint, while he studied his face intently.

"It was a very careless thing to do, to leave your watch in the schoolroom; you might have slipped chain and all into your pocket and then it would have been safe," Mr. Allen said, in reply.

"Yes, sir, I know I might; but I thought something might happen to it while I was playing at recess, and that it would be safer here. I'm sorry about the dollar, though, because mother gave it to me."

"You are quite sure it was attached to your chain when you took the watch off?" asked his teacher.

"Yes, sir, everything was all right but the bar; that I have here," and he drew it forth and held it up to view.

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"Do you suspect any one? Do you think of any one who would be likely to rob you of the coin?"

"I do not think I should like to say that I do, sir," responded Arthur, with apparent reluctance.

"Very well; you may go to your seat and I will make some inquiries regarding the matter, returned Mr. Allen, but looking greatly troubled.

Arthur obeyed, and the master immediately called the school to order, related what Arthur had told him, and asked if any one had seen a coin like the one he described.

No one answered, and every eye was bent upon the master in grave inquiry and perplexity.

"I hope," said Mr. Allen, sorrowfully, "that no one of my scholars would be guilty of taking that which belonged to another; but this coin is missing, and it is evident that it could not have become detached from Aspinwall's chain without hands. Louis, was there any one in the room with you during the morning?" inquired the gentleman, turning kindly to him.

"No, sir."

The master hesitated. He had learned to repose the utmost confidence in the boy, for he had always found him straightforward and honest, and he could not bear to question him closely about the matter. But he knew that suspicion would naturally fasten upon him, because he was the only one who brought his dinner and remained in the schoolroom, and it was his duty to sift the matter thoroughly.

"Do you know anything about Aspinwall's loss?" he asked, with an effort.

"No, sir; I did not even know that his watch was in the room," was the prompt reply.

"Were you here *all* the noon hour?"

"All but a very few minutes, when I went across the street to the store to get a pencil, and there was no one here when I came back."

He looked so honest, and spoke so confidently, that no one in the room believed him to be guilty of the theft, unless it was Arthur Aspinwall himself.

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"How long were you gone, do you think?" questioned Mr. Allen.

"Perhaps five minutes, sir; not more than that."

Some one might have entered the room and stolen the coin in that time, if it had been known that the watch was there, but it seemed unlikely.

However, Mr. Allen was glad to give Louis the benefit of the doubt; it would have shocked him greatly to have had him proven the thief.

"I trust not one of you has been guilty of this act," he said. solemnly. "But if any one has, in a moment of impulse, been led into wrong, I hope restitution will be made at once; remember, a sin confessed is half atoned."

A dead calm followed these serious words. Every face in the room was grave and troubled, but no one spoke, and the matter was dropped for the time.

Several days went by, and nothing more was said publicly on the subject, though there was a good deal of talk and surmise among the scholars, and Arthur hinted more than once, in Louis' hearing, at the fact of there being a thief in their midst, and it would be well for everybody to look carefully after his property.

Louis paid no attention to these inuendoes, for he was conscious of his own innocence, and he would not allow himself to be troubled by anything that his enemy could say.

He still wore that slender black cord, with its precious coin attached, about his neck; but, strangely enough, never once thought of it in connection with Arthur Aspinwall's loss, nor dreamed of the cunning plot that had been laid against him, and was so soon to bring him to shame.

"I say, you," said Arthur, one day, at recess, and in a confidential tone, to one of the worst boys in the school, "I wonder what Dunbar wears around his neck and is so very choice of?"

"Why, does he wear anything?" asked the boy, curiously.

"Yes; I've noticed a black cord about his neck lately."

"Perhaps it's his mother's picture," suggested Arthur's unsuspicious companion.

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"Maybe it is. I'd give considerable to know, though," responded Aspinwall, musingly.

"So would I, and I'll manage it before long," replied the other, with a resolute air.

A day or two after this conversation, one stormy morning, a lot of the scholars were gathered round the stove during recess, and Jim Cotton—for that was the name of Arthur's confidant—managed to slide up to Louis, who was taking that opportunity to look over his history lesson for the last time before going into the class.

Mr. Allen was standing near, explaining a difficult problem to a group of girls, and distinctly saw and heard all that followed.

"Seems to me, Louis, you're 'mazingly industrious to-day," remarked Jim, laying his hand familiarly on his shoulder, and speaking in a half derisive tone.

"I have to be, you know, in order to keep up with the class," Louis replied, without taking his eyes from his book.

"Humph! I don't think it pays to be moping over one's books all the time. What difference will it make in a hundred years whether you keep up with your class or not?" returned Jim, while his keen eyes seemed to be closely inspecting something in the region of Louis' collar.

"I don't suppose it will make any difference to the world in a hundred years, but it would make a good deal to me now if I did not," Louis quietly responded.

"Yes, anybody can see that you're bound to go ahead. Hulloa!" cried Jim, as if he had made a sudden discovery; "there's a great coarse black thread on the back of your neck—let me pick it off."

Before Louis was hardly aware of his intention, he had seized that slender black cord, and with a dextrous jerk, pulled from its hiding place in his bosom Margaret Houghton's treasured gift, and it hung glittering in his hands, and swinging back and forth before his astonished schoolmates.

Jim's "Hulloa!" had been heard by nearly every one,

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and the attention of nearly every person in the room was attracted by it to the two boys.

Mr. Allen had stopped his explanation to look, and now stood regarding Louis in speechless astonishment and displeasure, while a death-like hush instantly pervaded the room.

"I thought it was a thread on the back of his neck and tried to pull it off," Jim hastened to explain, but looking half frightened over what he had done; for he, as did every one else, believed that the thief who had stolen Arthur Aspinwall's coin was at last discovered.

But Louis, flushing a vivid crimson with shame to have his schoolmates know how he had treasured that simple gift, seized it quickly from Jim and clasped it tightly in his hand.

"Louis!" at last said Mr. Allen, in a voice of thunder, "what does this mean?"

"Sir?" and the youth turned toward him with a frightened look at that tone.

"How came you by that gold coin?"

"It was given to me, sir."

"*Given* to you!—by whom?"

"A little girl, sir;" and now Louis began to grow pale, as he saw toward what these questions were tending, and marked the expression of suspicion depicted upon the faces of those around him.

"A little girl gave it to you?" repeated Mr. Allen, severely. "When?"

"A year ago last June, sir."

"Have you worn it around your neck ever since that time?"

"Yes, sir."

But Louis hung his head at this confession and colored crimson again. Mr. Allen and his pupils thought it was from conscious guilt.

"I *hope* you are telling me the truth, Louis Dunbar," said the master, sternly, but his inflection implied a grave doubt.

"I *am*, sir," promptly returned the boy, and now his bright, dark eyes were lifted and met his teacher's

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steadily and frankly, though the color still remained in his cheeks.

Arthur Aspinwall now stepped forward, shooting a look of malice at Louis as he did so.

"Mr. Allen, I believe that dollar is mine," he said, confidently.

"Wait a moment, Arthur; I have a few more questions to ask. Louis, you may bring me that coin."

The boy opened his hand and looked wistfully upon his treasure; it was the only keepsake that he had ever possessed, and he could not bear to part with it.

But he hesitated only an instant. The next he stepped forward and laid it upon Mr. Allen's extended palm, though his lips quivered as he parted with it.

The man regarded him fixedly. The boy's manner did not betray a sign of guilt, yet the evidence seemed strong against him.

"What was the name of the little girl who gave you this?" he asked.

"I do not know what her last name was, sir; but I heard a servant call her 'Miss Margaret.'"

"Where does she live?"

"She lived *then* on the road from Boston to Brookline."

"How did she happen to give it to you?"

In a simple, straightforward way Louis related how he had strayed from the city on that hot summer's day; how he had been attracted by the sounds of mirth coming from a gentleman's grounds, and how the pretty child had greeted him, presenting him with the dollar, and then taken him up to the house and treated him to some of her birthday feast.

Mr. Allen watched him critically during the recital, and was convinced of its truth.

When Louis finished his story, the teacher stood thoughtfully considering the matter for several minutes.

"I think I will take charge of this piece of money for the present," he said, at last.

"I've had it so long, and—I told her that I would always keep it," Louis pleaded, in a husky voice, and his

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tone was so earnest, his eyes so wistful, that the man half relented.

But still there was a doubt about the matter; justice must be done at any cost, and he said, firmly, though not unkindly:

"If it can be proved that it rightly belongs to you, Louis, you shall have it again; but until this matter of Arthur's loss and your asserted ownership is settled, I shall keep it."

Louis said no more, but turned sadly away and went to his seat.

He was grave and troubled during the remainder of the day, and when at length school was dismissed he hastened home without exchanging a word with any one.

He saw that he was regarded with suspicion by the scholars, if not by his teacher, and was deeply hurt and mortified.

Nothing more was said openly about the matter for several days, though the children gathered in knots at recess, and before and after school, and discussed the matter quite spiritedly among themselves.

Saturday afternoon, while Louis was in the corn barn shelling the golden ears of grain to send to the mill, the door was suddenly opened, and Mr. Allen appeared in the aperture.

"Come, Louis," he said, in his brisk, hearty way. "I am going into Boston, and I have Mr. Brown's permission to take you with me."

The boy's face lighted, then fell.

He could not forget that he was still resting under a ban.

"You are very kind, sir," he began, "but——"

"We won't stop for 'buts' just now, for I am in a hurry. Run in and get ready as quickly as you can. I am going to drive in," Mr. Allen interrupted.

The boy left his work and proceeded to obey, but his eyes were averted, and his step was not the quick, elastic step of a lad anticipating a rare pleasure.

They drove along for a couple of miles, Mr. Allen chatting upon different topics, but, coming to a place

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where two roads crossed each other, instead of keeping straight on he turned to the right.

"This is not the way to Boston, sir," Louis observed.

"I am aware of that fact, my boy; but I am going to drive through Brookline," returned his teacher, smiling.

Louis flushed scarlet.

"I cannot rest," Mr. Allen continued, "until you are exonerated before the whole school; so I resolved that I would spend this afternoon in trying to solve the mystery of that contested coin. I am going to find your little Miss Margaret, if I can, and with her word to prove the truth of your story, you will stand acquitted of all wrong before the school."

"You are very good, sir," was all Louis could say, and Mr. Allen saw that his lips were quivering with emotion and his eyes were full of tears.

"Should you know the place if we pass it?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, sir. I shall never forget it, nor the great iron gate where she tossed the dollar through at me."

His face was all animation now.

He was convinced that his teacher believed in him, and that took a heavy load from his heart. But he could understand that it was necessary to have some tangible proof in order to satisfy the doubts of others, and surely it was very kind in the master to take all this trouble for him.

After that the drive was very pleasant, and finally they turned again into a road leading directly from Brookline to Boston, and after rolling along at a swift pace for about fifteen minutes, Louis said, pointing to a stately mansion which reared itself proudly behind its now leafless trees and shrubbery:

"That is the place, sir."

But a disappointment awaited them here, for the house was closed, and no amount of knocking or ringing brought any one to the door to answer their summons.

"They must have gone into the city, or perhaps South, for the winter," Mr. Allen observed, looking deeply disappointed, as they re-entered the carriage and drove away.

Louis looked earnestly up into his face, his great eyes

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as honest and frank as it is possible for a pair of eyes to be.

"Mr. Allen, that little dollar is mine, and I never stole anything from anybody in my life," he said, with a quiet dignity that was of itself quite convincing.

"I believe you, my boy; and I believe, too, that it will yet be satisfactorily proved to everybody. We must be patient a little longer—the family will doubtless return by spring, then we will come here again to interview little Miss Margaret," Mr. Allen returned, kindly and reassuringly, mentally resolving never to give up the matter until he had set the boy right in the sight of his schoolmates.

But the matter was settled long before the Houghtons returned to their country home, and in a way that brought justice to all parties.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### A WELCOME LETTER.

About the middle of the term, after a regular old-fashioned New England snowstorm, Mr. Allen announced, one morning, that he had arranged for a sleigh ride for the school for the following Wednesday, providing the weather should prove favorable.

They would meet at the schoolhouse at one o'clock, and go for a ten or twelve-mile ride, then return to the schoolroom where the parents and friends had agreed to provide a hot supper for them, after which they would spend the evening in a social manner.

This announcement, of course, created great rejoicing among the pupils; every face grew bright and animated with anticipation, and when recess arrived a general excitement prevailed.

At noon Arthur Aspinwall sought Mr. Allen and informed him that he had some young friends visiting him, and asked permission to invite them to join the sleighing party.

Mr. Allen readily granted his request, little thinking

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what was to grow out of the apparently trivial circumstance.

Wednesday arrived—a bright, perfect winter's day.

The heavens were a vault of wonderful, beautiful blue; the earth like a carpet of spotless down.

At precisely one o'clock two roomy sleighs, each drawn by four sleek, handsome horses, drew up before the schoolhouse door, and the happy children piled into them, shouting and frolicking, and full of life and joy.

Louis Dunbar was among them, and as light-hearted as any of them, although he took pains to find a seat in the sleigh far from Arthur Aspinwall. He had resolved not to have his pleasure spoiled that day by coming in contact with him, if it were possible to avoid him.

All were comfortably settled at last, the word was given, the drivers tightened their reins, cracked their whips, and away they went.

One of the sleighs, however, stopped before the stately residence of Judge Aspinwall. Arthur jumped out and ran in, but soon returned, accompanied by two young girls of perhaps twelve and fourteen years of age.

They were so securely protected from the weather, by numerous outer garments, that it was impossible to judge regarding their appearance, except that they had bright, sparkling eyes and rosy cheeks, and were as full of fun and frolic as the rest of the company.

They were assisted into the sleigh, while many curious glances were bestowed upon them, and then the merry company was driven on.

The ride was one never to be forgotten.

The roads were almost as smooth as polished marble, and the sleighs flew over them in the most exhilarating fashion.

A ride of twenty miles in such air, with such horses, and in such merry company, proved an excellent appetizer, and when the gay troup poured into the well-warmed and well-lighted schoolroom upon their return, and gathered around the beautifully spread tables, which had been temptingly arranged during their absence, it was a source of delight simply to watch them stow away the good things set before them.

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Mr. and Mrs. Brown had interested themselves on Louis' behalf, and were present to witness the goodly sight.

But something had suddenly seemed to come over Louis' spirits. He had been as gay as the gayest during the ride—it was his first experience of anything of the kind, and he had entered into the enjoyment of it with all his heart.

But during supper he seemed greatly embarrassed, even distressed.

The children had been formed in a procession and marched to their seats at the table, and when they were all seated Louis found himself directly opposite his master, who had Arthur Aspinwall on one side of him and the two little strangers on the other.

He had cast one glance at this group, given a violent start, turned a burning scarlet, then grown very white, after which he sat almost like a statue throughout the entire meal, scarcely tasting anything that was set before him—hardly heeding the mirth around him.

As soon as supper was over, he watched his opportunity, and, going to Mr. Allen when he was unoccupied for a moment, he asked, in a low, earnest voice:

"Mr. Allen, will you please tell me the name of the light-haired little girl who sat beside you at supper?"

"Certainly, Louis," replied his teacher, with an amused smile. "A very pretty little miss, isn't she? Her name is Margaret Houghton. She——"

"I *knew* it! I *knew* it!" interrupted Louis, excitedly. "*She* gave me the dollar, sir—oh, go ask her, quick!" and the lad was actually trembling in his eagerness.

Mr. Allen started and regarded him with astonishment.

"Are you *sure,* Louis?" he questioned, gravely.

"Yes, sir; I *never* could forget her. Nobody was ever so kind to me before—nobody ever gave me a present before, and I thought she was the most beautiful little girl I had ever seen. You *can't* think I would forget or mistake any one else for her," the boy returned, with flushed cheeks.

"Come with me," said Mr. Allen, briefly but kindly,

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and led him directly to where the two little strangers formed the center of a lively group.

One, Miss Ada Parker, was a bright little brunette, full of fun and sparkle, and she was entertaining her new acquaintances with a glowing account of city amusements. She was Arthur Aspinwall's cousin, and her companion—our former little friend, Margaret Houghton—was her most intimate school friend and confidante.

They had come for a little visit to the Aspinwalls', and to enjoy a few days of country frolic in mid-winter.

Margaret had noticed the grave, quiet boy opposite to her at supper, and wondered why he did not eat more after his long ride; but he was so greatly changed from what he had been on that summer day, a year and a half ago, that she did not recognize him as the poor boy to whom she had given the little golden dollar.

Mr. Allen led Louis directly to her.

"Miss Margaret," he said, "here is a young gentleman who claims acquaintance with you; do you recognize him?"

Margaret Houghton glanced from the speaker to his companion, and she saw that he was the grave boy she had noticed at supper.

Her laughing blue eyes instantly grew serious, and a puzzled expression came instantly.

For fully half a minute she stood thus regarding him, while the group about them grew silent and watchful; Arthur Aspinwall, among the number, looking pale and startled, as if he had a presentment of what was to follow.

Louis' dark eyes met those blue ones, and held them with a wistful, appealing look; but not one word did he speak, though his heart beat heavily, and there was a choking sensation in his throat.

He wanted the recognition to come from that beautiful girl without having to remind her of the circumstances under which they had first met.

Her memory served her well.

Now that her attention had been particularly drawn to him, and she studied his face carefully, she began to

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trace something familiar in his countenance, and a light broke gradually over her own.

"Why," she said at last, a lovely smile chasing the perplexity from her brow, "you are the boy who came to my party a year ago last summer! But how nice you've grown!—I hardly knew you."

A shout went up from the group around them, for Louis' schoolmates comprehended the situation at once, and knew that this was the little "Miss Margaret," of whom he had told them at the time of the trouble about Arthur Aspinwall's missing dollar.

The sound was music in the boy's ears, for it testified to the sympathy and good will of his companions; but it rather disturbed the pretty stranger's composure, and she looked around surprised, and blushing from embarrassment.

Mr. Allen saw it, and enjoined quiet by a motion of his hand; then bending toward his little guest, he asked, gently:

"And do you remember the little gift you bestowed upon him that day?"

"Oh, that was nothing, sir." she answered, blushing more deeply than before; "it was only a little gold dollar, with a hole and a ring in it, and—and," with a shy glance at Louis, as if deprecating this explanation before so many. "I thought it might please him to have it."

Louis felt as if he could almost have fallen down and kissed her little feet for uttering those precious words, which could not fail to exonerate him from all suspicion of wrong-doing.

He moved a step nearer his teacher.

"Please, sir, may I have it again now?" he asked, eagerly.

The little souvenir would be more, more precious than ever after this.

Without a word, Mr. Allen took a tiny box from one of his pockets and handed it to him.

Louis eagerly opened it, and, taking out the shining coin within, held it up by the black cord before its pretty donor, with an air of triumph.

"I told you I should always keep it!" he said.

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She put out one plump white hand and took it.

"Why," she said, bending a look, half of pity, half of surprise, upon his flushed, earnest face, while she wondered at the eager interest manifested by those about them, "I had no idea that you would care so much for it."

"I shall care more now than ever," the boy answered, with a slight quiver of his lips. "If I live to be a hundred years old, I shall never part with it!"

"How strange!" Margaret Houghton said, a bright color suffusing her cheek at his earnest words; while, years after, she remembered the strange thrill which, young as she was, stirred her heart as her eyes met the almost reverent look in his.

But there was no time for any more conversation, just then, for Mr. Allen called the company to order, and when everybody was seated, he announced that he had a short programme to be performed for the entertainment of their friends.

A few of the older pupils then went forward, and a number of readings and declamations followed, which did credit to both teachers and scholars. After that, several of the gentlemen made remarks, and thus the remainder of the evening passed agreebly to all.

Just before dismissing the company, Mr. Allen remarked:

"I have a little explanation which I wish to make before we go to our homes, and I make it thus publicly because I know that nearly all present know something of the circumstances, and I consider it only just to remove a false impression which may have prevailed during the last few weeks. It will be remembered that a member of the school lost a charm from his watch chain —a coin which had been given to him by a dear friend— a short time ago, and not long afterward a suspicion of dishonesty was fastened upon Louis Dunbar, because it was discovered that he had in his possession a piece of money which appeared identical with the missing one. He explained how it came to be in his possession, telling us that it had been given to him by a little girl more than a year ago; but there was nothing to prove the truth of his statements save his own words, and appear-

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ances were so strong against him that a cloud has hung over him ever since. I am happy now, however, to be able to state that he has to-night been exonerated from all suspicion, for the donor of the contested coin, Miss Margaret Houghton, is present with us this evening, and has recognized Dunbar and corroborated his story in every respect. I am very glad to make this explanation, for since entering our school Louis Dunbar has conducted himself in a way to gain both my confidence and esteem. He has been a close and thorough student, and has made rapid progress in his studies, though laboring under some disadvantages, while he has always manifested a manly spirit, and a desire to please both his teacher and his classmates."

There was not a person in the room, excepting Arthur Aspinwall, who did not listen to these statements with unbounded pleasure, and a vigorous handclapping instantly testified to the hearty sympathy which was felt for Louis by both old and young.

The youthful hero, though greatly embarrassed and blushing crimson at being made so conspicuous, was as proud and happy a boy as ever walked the earth, while he mentally resolved then and there that no dishonorable act should ever mar his future life—that no meanness of any kind should ever tarnish his fair fame; the satisfaction which he experienced in possessing a clear conscience and a light heart and a good reputation was altogether too pleasant to be sacrificed for any temporary worldly advantage.

"I am bound to be a rich man if I can. I mean to get just as high a place in the world as possible; but I'll never do anything wrong to gain my ends, for I believe that would spoil it all," he thought, as he sat there and listened to the clapping of those many hands, and knew that almost every eye was bent upon him with pleasure and approval.

After the company was dismissed he was standing near the master's desk waiting to get a basket which Mrs. Brown had brought, when Margaret Houghton and her friend, Ada Parker, came toward him with shining faces and outstretched hands.

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Both congratulated him upon the fact that all unpleasantness was past, and remarked that he ought to be a very proud boy to have his teacher think and speak so well of him.

Almost at the same moment, and while he bashfully thanked them for their kindness, he heard Mr. Allen's voice just behind him, saying:

"I hope, Arthur, that you will no longer harbor any unkind feeling toward Louis. You can see now how easy it is to be mistaken and to wrong an innocent person. If I had yielded to you when you claimed his coin, I should have done him a great wrong. I want you two boys to shake hands and be friends."

He uttered these last words in a louder tone and turned toward Louis, who looked up with a frank, pleasant smile and started forward with outstretched hand, as if eager to follow his teacher's suggestion.

But Arthur Aspinwall looked down with a sullen scowl and drew haughtily back.

Nothing was further from his desire than to be friendly with the boy whom he had so wilfully and maliciously injured, and whom he now hated a hundredfold for having been so lauded and applauded by his teacher and the assembled company.

Mr. Allen's face grew stern, and Louis was greatly embarrassed by Arthur's manner; but, before either could speak, Arthur's cousin, Ada Parker, started forward, exclaiming:

"Why, Arthur, was it *you* who lost the coin like the one Margie gave Louis Dunbar?"

"Yes," he answered, turning quickly toward her, and glad of anything to relieve him from his unpleasant position.

"And did it have a hole and a ring in it, too?"

"Yes; why?"

"Well, then," the young girl continued eagerly, and all unconscious of the mischief she was doing: "Aunt Annie told Margie and me this morning that if we wanted to make ourselves useful, we might go up into your room and put your bureau in order. Of course we began with the upper drawer first, and as I opened it I saw your

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jewelry box in it. I lifted the cover just to take a peep at your treasures, and a gold dollar, with a little ring in it, lay right in plain sight in the tray. How very strange that you should not have noticed it!"

Arthur had grown deadly white during this innocent explanation, and, after one glance of dismay at his cousin, he involuntarily lifted his guilty eyes to Mr. Allen's face.

It was terrible in its expression of sternness and contempt.

The man held his glance for one dreadful moment, then turned away without one word of comment, and left the group; but the miserable boy knew that his meanness and treachery were all revealed to him. He saw that he knew as well as if he had confessed it, that he had done the dastardly deed to ruin the reputation of the boy whom he disliked and envied.

It was too much for Arthur to bear, even with his hardened conscience, and he slunk out of sight with all possible speed, leaving his little guests to be attended by his parents to his home.

The next morning he did not make his appearance in school. He had taken cold the previous day, was his excuse, and the next that Mr. Allen heard regarding him was that he was attending some school in the city, going back and forth by rail every day.

The good man sighed, but could only predict an unhappy future for one who could begin life with such a dishonorable act as he had committed.

A few days after the sleighing party, Farmer Brown returned from the postoffice, bearing a neat little package in his hands, which he quietly handed to Louis.

The boy received it with a look of astonishment. It was directed to him in a neat, clear hand, so there could be no mistake as to the intended recipient.

Removing the wrapper, the boy found a lovely volume of Whittier's poems bound in crimson and gold, and turning to the fly-leaf, he read, while a flush of pleasure mounted to his brow:

"*Louis Dunbar; with the best wishes of*
"MARGARET HOUGHTON."

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The beautiful book, with its thick, tinted, gilt-edge leaves, its clear, delightful type and lovely illustrations, must have cost several dollars, and Louis felt as if some wonderful prize had been awarded him, while as he was turning the pages with tender, reverent hands, he suddenly came across a folded sheet of paper.

His heart bounded into his throat.

Could it be that the beautiful girl had written him a letter also?

Yes; for opening, he read:

"LOUIS DUNBAR: I think you are very nice, and I want to tell you so. I should be very proud to have my teacher say about me what Mr. Allen said about you, the other night at the school party. I am going away in the spring to Europe with papa and mamma; but I shall not forget you, and I hope I shall see you again when I come back, which will not be for five or six years, perhaps longer. You will be a man by that time, and I shall be almost a young lady; but I feel sure I shall be glad to call you my friend then, for you look as if you mean to be a good man. I love Whittier's poems very much, so I send a copy of them to you to prove how glad I am that everything is all right again at school with you. I told mamma about it, and she says you are a 'brave, manly fellow,' and told me to pick out the prettiest book I could find for you. I hope you will like it.

"Your friend, MARGARET HOUGHTON."

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## CHAPTER VII.

### MR. ALLEN'S PROPOSITION.

"I *do* mean to be a good man—I *will* be a good man," resolved Louis Dunbar, with a grave, earnest face, as he finished perusing Margaret Houghton's simple, girlish letter, so full of sincere interest and hearty good will; while the possession of that beautiful book of poems sent a thrill of delight over him such as he had never before experienced.

After thoroughly examining it and reading again his letter, he put them both away with that other book and his mother's ring, and henceforth numbered it among his most sacred treasures, while he mentally registered a vow that if he should live to see Margaret Houghton return to America, he would indeed be worthy to be

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recognized as her friend; he would bend every energy toward becoming a wise and good, as well as a rich man.

* * * * * * *

"Louis, what are you going to do this summer?" Mr. Allen asked him on the last day of the spring term, when, the examination over, he had done great credit to both himself and his teacher.

"I suppose I shall remain with Mr. Brown; there seems to be nothing else for me to do," the boy responded, thoughtfully, but with a regretful sigh, as if his soul were longing for something more congenial than strawberry fields and humdrum farm life.

"I do not believe you could do better for this summer," Mr. Allen returned; "but I have been thinking you might improve your condition somewhat after that. A farmer's life is a good and honorable one, but I believe you ought to be fitted for something different. Now, I have a proposition to make to you."

"All right, sir," Louis answered, looking up with a smile, and speaking eagerly.

"I do not intend," resumed his friend, "to retain my position here after the close of this school year. I contemplate opening a law office in the city next fall. I shall need a boy to perform small services for me and assist me somewhat in copying. I shall not, however, be able to pay very much at first—not over a couple of dollars a week for the first six months. Now, if you think you will like to come to me for that, I shall be glad to have you, for I feel that I can trust you thoroughly. You can go on with your studies with me, and I will do all that I can to help you to acquire a good education; and if, with experience, you think you would like to become a lawyer, too, I may be able to fit you for the bar. I want you to think this over carefully this summer, and when you are sure of your decision, come and make it known to me."

"I believe I shall like what you propose very much, sir," Louis said, his face as bright as a new dollar at the prospect spread out before him.

"Do not decide rashly, my boy," replied his teacher,

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smiling at his enthusiasm. "You have a good place here with Mr. Brown; he is fond of you, and no doubt will do well by you if you remain with him. The remuneration I offer you will be very small at first, hardly enough for your support; but I could arrange for you to sleep in my office, which would save you the expense of a lodging, and the rest we could manage some way. But, Louis, I want you to have an education, and I am afraid if you are left to yourself you will neglect it until it is too late."

All summer long, at morning and evening, no matter what he was doing, this offer of Mr. Allen's was constantly in Louis' mind. He had had a sip at the chalice of knowledge, and he was thirsting for more. He had begun to prize wisdom even above wealth.

Two dollars a week would, indeed, be very little to earn; he certainly would not grow rich very rapidly at that rate, but he realized a need which he had never felt before, and he knew he should never be worthy to be Margaret Houghton's friend when, by and by, she should return from Europe, polished and educated, unless he seized every opportunity to store his mind and fit himself for a position which would enable him to meet her upon an equal footing.

Besides all this, he had begun to love study for learning's sake. Mr. Allen's teaching had given him a mental impetus, and he knew he should never be satisfied with himself until he was fitted to mingle with refined and cultivated people.

"I shall go with Mr. Allen to Boston," he at last decided, and then applied himself with tenfold diligence to the business of making all the money he could before the time of the contemplated change.

He had grown both tall and strong since coming into the country, and, in spite of the hard work that he had done, he felt like a young giant for strength.

He was now nearly fifteen years of age, and as fine and manly a young fellow as one would care to see.

His waving chestnut hair lay in glossy masses above a broad, intelligent forehead; his bright, brown eyes met yours with a frankness and honesty of expression which

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prepossessed you in his favor at once, while a winning, genial smile lighted up his whole face whenever he spoke, showing that a warm, kind heart lay beneath his attractive exterior.

"I am loth to part with you, Louis, my boy," said Farmer Brown, regretfully, when the youth told him of his decision to go to the city with Mr. Allen; "but you will be in excellent hands, and I approve of your plan heartily.

"You must always regard us as your friends," he added, "and come to us whenever you can. I've no children, you know, and I've grown to look upon you almost as belonging to me during the two years you have been with us. I shall watch your future with a great deal of interest, and if you make a brilliant mark in the world no one will be more proud of you than I."

He presented him with a handsome new suit and twenty-five dollars in money, besides what he already owed him; while Mrs. Brown gave him a good, serviceable silver watch, and with motherly interest looked after his supply of underwear.

"It'll be a good timekeeper for you until you can afford to have a better one," she said, when giving him the watch; "and, Louis, be sure you let it tick off some *good deed done* every day of your life, for the deeds of this world make the blessing or the curse of the next. Don't forget it, dear, and Heaven bless you!"

Louis resolved he would not forget, and thought that no boy in the world had ever received greater kindness than these good friends had bestowed upon him.

"What are you going to do with your money?" the farmer asked, the day before he was to leave him.

"Leave it in your care still, sir, if you are willing to be troubled with it. I know it could not be in safer hands."

"All right. I shall be glad to take care of it for you. I will continue the six per cent. interest the same as I have done, and if you allow it to accumulate you'll have a snug sum by the time you are twenty-one. I must say, I think it is pretty thrifty in a boy of your age to save up three hundred dollars in a little more than two years."

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"I do not think the credit all belongs to me, sir," Louis answered. "You have been very kind to me, and have given me every opportunity to earn, and I am very grateful to you."

The boy's first six months in the city were rather uneventful ones. He slept in Mr. Allen's office, or rather in a tiny room leading from it, and took his meals with Mrs. Jones, who said she would be glad of the two dollars a week, which his employer paid him for his board.

This arrangement made it a little hard for him, as the woman lived a long distance from the office, but she was having more trials than ever, since her husband seemed to become less and less capable of supporting his family, thus making her burdens far heavier than before; consequently Louis was glad that he could contribute his small mite, if it would help to relieve her in any way.

His duties consisted in keeping the office in order, taking care of the fire, receiving calls and business notices during Mr. Allen's absence, and running of errands for him.

He was not kept so busy but that he had plenty of time for study, and he improved this most faithfully, while he often copied for the young lawyer so neatly and rapidly as to win high praise and encouragement.

When spring opened, Mr. Allen's prospects had so improved that he increased Louis' wages to four dollars a week, and the boy felt more than satisfied, for his kind friend was doing his utmost to advance him in his studies, and he realized that he was making rapid progress.

Both decided to continue their work and remain in the city throughout the summer.

"I have not made money fast enough to entitle me to a vacation this year," Mr. Allen remarked to Louis when his brother lawyers began to flit to the mountains and seashore. "I shall stay quietly here and catch what business I can; but you shall go to Farmer Brown's for a couple of weeks, if you like. I know he would be glad to have you."

But Louis said no—he preferred to remain with his

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friend and go on with his lessons, adding, with a sly twinkle in his bright eyes:

"I am sure if *you* have not made money enough to entitle you to a vacation, *I* certainly have not."

"You are as ambitious as ever, I see," said Mr. Allen, smiling. "What do you say to fitting for a regular course? You are getting on so well you could easily do it in another year."

Louis looked grave. He would like nothing better than to go through college; but he knew that there were serious difficulties in the way.

"Why cannot I have a regular college course by myself?" he asked, after thinking the matter over for a while.

"What do you mean by that, Louis?"

"You have been through college, haven't you?"

"Yes, I graduated at Yale a few years ago."

"Then why cannot *you* put me through just the course that you have had? I am willing to study hard, for I realize the need and advantage of a good education, but I do not see my way clear to giving four years of my life to study alone, to say nothing of the money that would be needed for it."

"Many a boy with less ability than you possess has worked his way through college," replied Mr. Allen, thoughtfully; then he added: "I should like nothing better than to teach you, for you are such an apt and appreciative pupil; but you could not have your degree—that can only be obtained by going through a university course."

"I shall not care so much for the degree—the knowledge is what I wish for particularly," Louis returned. "If I had a father who was able to send me to college, I should be only too glad to avail myself of the opportunity; but, since I have my own way to fight through the world, I believe I must give up the degree, and pick up what education I can in other ways."

"Very well; perhaps you have decided wisely. I am ready to do whatever I can to help you, and I will instruct you as thoroughly as I am able; only I warn you beforehand that it will be hard work for you."

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"I like hard work," Louis replied, undauntedly. "I like to grapple with anything that requires the use of all my powers; that is," he added, with a smile, "if there is a prospect of my coming off conqueror. I think it is grand to find yourself face to face with a difficulty and then fight your way, inch by inch, above it."

Mr. Allen looked into the boy's glowing face, and said to himself:

"That boy has the spirit of a hero within him; he will do something brilliant in the world yet."

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### A WELL-DRESSED STRANGER.

But Louis was not to have smooth sailing all the way along; he was destined to find himself "face to face with a difficulty" which was to call into more vigorous exercise than ever before all the powers of his soul. He was soon to be forced to grapple with influences which for a time were to threaten to annihilate all his lofty resolves, and to ingulf him in the very vortex of crime and dishonor.

One day Farmer Brown came in to make him a little visit. He was in the city on a matter of business, and could not think of returning without making some inquiries as to how Louis was progressing.

Louis was, of course, much pleased to see him, and, taking him into his small sanctum, where they would be undisturbed, they had a long and confidential conversation. Among other subjects, that of the boy's obscure birth came up, and Louis rehearsed to him more fully than he had ever done before all that he knew concerning himself.

"If there is anything that you particulaly need, Louis," said the farmer, at the close of the interview, as he rose to go, "or if you ever get into any quandary, I hope you will come to me, for I shall be glad to help you whenever I can."

Louis thanked him, and followed him out into the

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office, where, to their surprise, they found a strange man waiting.

At the first glance he might have been called a fine-looking man, for he was well formed, having a rather dark face, with regular features, a luxuriant growth of glossy, curling, raven hair, and full beard, bright, restless black eyes, a frank smile, and an easy, off-hand manner.

He was standing by the door, as if he had just entered the room, but neither Louis nor Mr. Brown had heard the door open or close, consequently they had no idea how long he might have been there.

The stranger had bowed politely, his keen eyes taking a rapid survey of both boy and man, and inquired for Mr. Allen.

"He is out, sir, for a couple of hours. Will you leave any message for him?" Louis answered, courteously.

"No; I think not. I desire to see him personally," replied the stranger, while his glance held Louis', for the moment, with a sort of magnetism that made the boy's heart give a sudden bound in his bosom; it seemed to read him through and through—to almost take possession of him.

The next moment he was bowing himself out of the office with a polite "good-morning," saying that he would call again in a day or two.

"Where have I seen that man before?" Louis murmured in a low, preoccupied tone as the door closed after him.

"I can't tell you, Louis; but I hope you won't see much of him in the future," remarked Farmer Brown, dryly, adding: "There's a heart brimful of mischief under that sly face, or I'm vastly mistaken." And then he, too, took his leave.

All day long that strange, dark face haunted our young friend's thoughts; but it was not until evening, when he was on his way home to supper, that he could recall where he had seen it before.

One day during the summer he had treated himself to a run down the harbor, and to a clam-bake at Nantasket.

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Opposite him at the table four men had been seated, and he now remembered that this stranger was one of them.

They seemed to be in company, and in a very jovial humor; but he had not liked either their faces or their conversation, while he had remarked that they were covertly observant of him.

On the boat, too, when returning to the city, he thought it strange that two of them should pass back and forth so many times that portion of the deck where he was sitting.

But, upon landing, he had sped away toward home, thinking no more about it, and these events had not recurred to him since.

He did not dream that he had been shadowed to the very door of Mary Jones' humble dwelling, nor that upon those seemingly unimportant events circumstances of strange import were hinging themselves.

His surprise may be imagined when, upon reaching home—as he still called Mrs. Jones' abode—he was informed that a strange gentleman had been during the day inquiring about him.

The woman's motherly eyes filled with tears as she spoke.

"About me? What gentleman? What did he want?" Louis questioned, in surprise.

"Such a nice-looking gentleman," answered Mrs. Jones, animatedly; "and he asked such a lot of questions about you. He knew your name, and that I had had you ever since you were a little baby, and he wanted me to tell him all the particulars of your poor mother's sickness and death. Of course, I told him, and you ought to have seen how used up he was when he heard about all her hardships, and how she came to her end."

Louis looked more and more astonished, while some of the ruddy color went out of his young face as he listened.

Was it possible that he was about to learn something concerning the secret of his mother's identity and his own birth?

"When I got through, he said, in a trembling kind of

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way, that he believed she was his wife. He told me that years ago he married a sweet young girl, and soon after went away to California, leaving her here until he could make money enough to get a home for her and send for her to come to him. He never heard from her but once, though he kept writing to her until he could endure it no longer, and then came back to hunt her up. But he couldn't find her nor any trace of her, and at last, believing she must be dead, he went back in despair and tried to drown his grief in hard work. He began to make money fast, and at last, about two years ago, he came back again, and somehow, a little while ago, he heard of your story, and, following it up, he at last came to me to get the facts of it. Oh, Louis, what if this gentleman should turn out to be your father!"

Louis' heart thrilled at the words; then an unaccountable depression followed.

"What was he like?" he asked, in a suppressed tone.

"He was tall and large, with such black hair and whiskers, and black eyes which seemed to look you straight through. He was pleasant, though, and very handsome when he smiled, and he was splendidly dressed."

Louis felt another shock. This description tallied with the appearance of the man who had come to the office that day and inquired for Mr. Allen, and Louis had not been prepossessed, as we know, in his favor.

"What is his name?" he asked.

Mrs. Jones looked blank at this question.

The man had talked and talked violently, asking questions that had drawn more information from her than he had given; but that had not once occurred to her until now, nor had she once thought to ask his name.

"He did not tell me," she admitted, regretfully.

"Did not tell you his name," exclaimed Louis, astonished.

"No, child," answered the woman, recovering herself, "but what harm?—there is time enough yet to ask that. He had so much to say about your mother, and wanted to know all about her after she came to live here, that I never thought to ask that, never imagining it could be anybody but Dunbar, which very likely it is, or he

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would have said so himself. He called his wife his 'dear Annie'—and we know that was your mother's name—and said she was a sweet, blue-eyed little thing, and described her so well, that I've thought of him ever since as Mr. Dunbar. I tell you, Louis, he's a fine-looking gentleman, and he gave me ten dollars, 'just to get some trifles for the children," and said, too, if you proved to be his boy, he should do something handsome for me for what I've done for you; though I told him, as for that matter, you'd always been such a good boy that you'd paid your way as you went along."

Louis ate his supper in a very thoughtful mood, after which he returned to the office, attended to his duties there, and then retired to rest with a heavy heart.

To the great disappointment of Louis, the stranger did not appear the next day, but on the second morning, about eleven o'clock, the boy's heart gave a great bound as the office door opened and the man whom he had been looking for walked in and requested a private interview with Mr. Allen.

It was, of course, granted, and the two men were closeted together for three of the longest hours that Louis ever remembered to have passed, and, what was more tantalizing of all, at the end of that time they went out together, and Louis had to curb his impatience still longer.

Mr. Allen did not return until late in the afternoon, and then he appeared both grave and troubled, and sat in a brown study for a long time.

"Louis," he said, as the boy was about starting out for his supper, "get back as soon as you can, for I am going to remain in the office this evening and want to have a talk with you."

"All right, sir," Louis returned, but the same thrill and shock, such as he had experienced upon learning of the strange gentleman's visit to Mary Jones, went through him again.

When he returned he found his employer bending over his desk, intently studying some papers that were spread out before him.

He pushed them aside, however, as soon as Louis en-

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tered the room, and, leaning back in his chair while he motioned him to be seated in another, abruptly requested him to tell him again all that he knew of his own history.

With a strange presentment, but without asking any questions, Louis briefly related all that Mr. Jones had told him regarding himself and his mother, and concluded by speaking of the book of poems and her wedding ring, which he still had in his possession.

"Have you them here at the office?"

"Yes, sir."

He sprang into his tiny room and returned almost immediately, bringing the box containing his treasures, which he placed in his friend's hands.

The lawyer examined its contents critically, and then compared the date engraven upon the ring with one of the papers which he had been studying when Louis came in.

"Well, Louis," he said, gravely, after a thoughtful silence, "*I* have a story to tell *you* now, and a strange one, too. To come to the point at once, the man who came here this morning, and with whom I went out, claims, or wants to claim, you as his son."

Louis grew very pale as he listened to this statement; but he made no comment, and Mr. Allen continued:

"He says that seventeen years ago this fall he was married to a young girl by the name of Annie Burgess. She was an orphan and working, at that time, at the dressmaker's trade here in Boston, and he describes her as a pretty, blue-eyed, delicate girl, who had a fair education, and who was unusually refined and delicate in manner, considering her station in life. Soon after his marriage some of his friends got the California fever, and tried to persuade him to go with them to the land of gold. At first he refused, feeling that he could not leave his young wife, for, of course, he knew he could not take her with him. But they urged him so strongly and pictured everything in such glowing colors that at last he yielded. He was a carpenter by trade, and was having steady work and good pay here, but he sold his tools, collected all money due him, which he divided with his wife, who, when she found her efforts unavailing

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to dissuade him from such a wild, untried life, said she would return to her trade and do what she could toward her own support until he could provide a home and send for her. They parted, promising to be faithful to each other and to write every week. He received just one letter from her, written some months after he arrived at the mines, and begging him to send her some tidings of himself. This told him that she had not heard from him, though he had sent her his promised letter every week. He grew very anxious as time went on and he heard nothing more, and he became unspeakably wretched, especially as in that one letter his wife had confided to him that she was expecting to become a mother.

"Finally he could endure his anxiety no longer, and returned to seek some tidings of her. But he could find no trace of her. Her former employers knew nothing of her, as she had not remained many months with them after her husband's departure. He says that he spent a year looking for her, employing every means he could think of to gain some knowledge of her, but without avail. At last, disouraged and sad, he returned to the mines and tried to drown his sorrow in the excitement of striving to get rich. He was successful, steadily making money for a number of years until he had acquired a moderate fortune, and a year ago decided to return and settle here in Boston. A few months since he incidentally learned something of your story; became interested, and, after making some inquiries and learning your age, the thought occurred to him that you might, perhaps, be his child. At last he resolved to see the woman with whom you lived, and, day before yesterday, he visited and questioned her thoroughly, and is now convinced that the woman who died with her was his wife. He gave the date of his marriage and proved it by a certificate which is properly signed, and to-day I have been with him to examine the city records and find the marriage regularly recorded. It all looks fair and plausible, since you have shown me your mother's wedding ring with the date, which is the same as that of the certificate. I must confess I feel impressed that you are

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the son of this gentleman and the young hero of this strange romance."

"But who is he? you have not told me his name. Does he call himself Dunbar?" demanded Louis, with some excitement, as his friend concluded.

"No; he gives his name as Louis Murray."

"But my mother's name was Mrs. Dunbar."

"I know, and I raised that as an objection to his claim; but he cleared away that doubt by telling me that her maiden name was Annie Dunbar Burgess, and he thinks the reason she adopted her middle name was that after writing to him repeatedly and receiving no reply, she believed herself deserted, and so, as she was about to become a mother, resolved to hide herself from all her former acquaintances."

Louis' head fell upon his breast, and he sat lost in thought for some time. At last he looked up into his friend's face and his own was very pale.

"Mr. Allen," he said, in a repressed tone, "this man may be my father. I am bound to say his story sounds all right, and the names, and date of the certificate, and ring almost seem to prove it; but, somehow, I do not feel at all in sympathy with him, and, day before yesterday, when he came here and inquired for you, I was repelled by him—I seemed to *shrink* from him. It is a hard thing to say, if he is indeed my father; but at least I may confess it to you who have been so good a friend to me," the boy concluded, with emotion.

Mr. Allen regarded him gravely for a moment; then he said:

"Perhaps when you become acquainted with him this feeling will wear away. He is coming to-morrow morning to have a talk with you, and, really, since it all seems so plain, I hope everything will be pleasantly settled, and that you will find a kind friend as well as parent in this gentleman. May be," his friend concluded, with his genial smile, "you will now have you heart's desire, go to college and become an educated gentleman yourself; for Mr. Murray appears to be a man of means, and will doubtless wish to give his son all the advantages he craves."

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He spoke cheerfully, but in his heart he felt the same dislike .and suspicion experienced by Louis There seemed to be something insincere and cunning about Mr. Murray, and he, the lawyer, inwardly rebelled at the thought of giving Louis up to his guardianship.

## CHAPTER IX.

### A CHANGE OF RESIDENCE.

The next morning, at an early hour, Mr. Louis Murray made his appearance in Mr. Allen's office.

He was dressed with great care, his clothing being of the finest texture and make; while in his immaculate shirt front there gleamed a diamond like a spark of fire.

The lawyer greeted him politely, and then introduced Louis, who was observing the stranger with grave earnestness.

Mr. Murray turned to him with a brilliant smile, and eagerly extended his white hand, upon which there was another stone of purest water.

"I suppose Mr. Allen has informed you, Louis, of the relations which undoubtedly exist between us, and I trust you are prepared to acknowledge them with as much gratitude and pleasure as I do," he said, earnestly.

Louis mechanically gave him his hand, and studied his face with his dark, wistful eyes while he was speaking; but there was not one answering thrill of sympathy in his heart to the sentiments the man had expressed.

"It seems very strange," he stammered, confusedly, "I cannot realize it."

"Of course you cannot," returned the gentleman, pleasantly; "but I trust when we come to know each other better, you will gradually learn to feel something of affection for me, such as I am prepared to bestow upon you. If you could know how I have mourned over the loss of your mother, and your hitherto unknown fate, I am sure your sympathies could not fail to reach out toward me," Mr. Murray concluded, with apparent emotion.

"Have you a picture of my mother, sir?" Louis asked,

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eagerly. He had always been so hungry to know what his mother had been like.

"I am sorry to say that I have not," Mr. Murray replied. "I took one away with me when I went to California, but it was stolen from me among some other things."

Louis sighed. Somehow he could not feel quite satisfied to acknowledge this man as his father, without stronger proofs than he had yet produced.

"I have a little book of poems that belonged to my mother, and there is some writing in it in a gentleman's hand, signed A. I have always thought that he might have been my father," Louis said, with a preoccupied air.

Mr. Murray changed color, whether on account of Louis' reluctance to acknowledge the relationship between them, or at the thought of some other man having bestowed a gift upon his wife, Mr. Allen, who was observing him closely, could not determine.

"Will you allow me to look at the book?" he asked, gently, after a moment.

Louis stepped to the desk and handed him the volume, which he had shown to Mr. Allen the evening previous.

Mr. Murray took it and turned to the fly-leaf, reading the verse which had been penned by that hitherto unknown hand.

"Ah, yes!" he said, his face suddenly lighting; "I remember now. Annie had a cousin named Alfred Burgess. He died several months before our marriage. He must have given this to your mother, although I had forgotten the fact, if, indeed, I ever knew it. Oh!" he exclaimed, with a start, a moment after, as, having turned the pages, he came to those last fly-leaves, where Louis' mother had penciled some quotations, "here is some of the dear child's own handwriting."

He stopped, and seemed overcome at the sight of it, and Louis' heart began to warm toward him on account of this evidence of his affection for his mother.

"She wrote such a pretty, delicate hand," Mr. Murray went on, regarding it tenderly; "and Alfred was a handsome penman, too. Poor fellow! he got hurt in an elevator and never recovered from it; his right lung was

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injured, and he went into quick consumption, dying in about three months. Is this all you have that belonged to your mother? Was there no jewelry? I gave her a handsome engagement-ring, and some other trinkets, and the wedding-ring was dated."

Louis started up eagerly.

The man's last words had inspired him with more of confidence than anything that had yet transpired.

"I have nothing but her wedding-ring; everything else had to be sold to pay her last expenses," he said, sadly.

"Let me see it, please; what is the date engraven upon it?" demanded Mr. Murray, eagerly.

"The date corresponds with that upon the certificate which you gave Mr. Allen yesterday," the boy replied, passing him the ring with a trembling hand.

He was beginning to be considerably excited over these revelations.

"Yes, yes; how vividly the events of that day return to me!" murmured Mr. Murray, in a husky tone.

"Louis," he continued, giving the youth a yearning glance, "I suppose I should not expect you to feel much affection for me all at once, as you have never known a father's care and love; but if you will come to me and let me assume a parent's place toward you, I will do all in my power to win your regard in the future. I have some means, and you need no longer work for yourself as you have done; I will give you all the advantages I can, and if you have any special project in view I will assist to carry it out."

"Thank you, sir," Louis responded, gratefully.

"Louis' chief desire now seems to be to get a thorough education," observed Mr. Allen, who was also beginning to feel elated by the apparent change for the better in Louis' prospects, even though he experienced deep regret at the thought of losing him.

"Ah! what have been your educational advantages thus far?" Mr. Murray questioned.

"Very limited, sir, until within the last three years; during that time Mr. Allen had taught me almost all I know," Louis responded, with a grateful look at his friend.

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"You seem to owe Mr. Allen a great deal," dryly remarked Mr. Murray.

"I do, sir; he and Mr. Brown have been my best friends."

"Who is Mr. Brown?"

"The man whom you saw here the first time you came to inquire for Mr. Allen."

"Oh, yes; the one with whom you lived for two years or more."

"Yes, sir."

"He took quite an interest in you, and paid you very well for your services, considering you were a boy, Mrs. Jones informed me."

"He gave me a chance to earn considerable."

"And you saved a snug little sum, I hear."

"Yes," Louis admitted, somewhat reluctantly.

"You are a credit to yourself, Louis, and I confess I feel quite proud of you already," observed Mr. Murray, rubbing his white hands together with an air of satisfaction. "Now about this matter of education," he continued after a moment; "how far advanced are you?"

"He could be ready for college by another year, if he is willing to work hard for it," Mr. Allen interposed.

"By another year!—that is pretty well, considering all things. I understand that you are still conducting his studies?" said Mr. Murray inquiringly.

"Yes, I feel a deep interest in Louis; I think he has great ability, and I should be glad if he could have a thorough collegiate course," returned the lawyer.

"Could you be persuaded to let him go on with you until he is fitted for college—that is, of course, for a proper consideration? I am sure such an arrangement would be better than any change he could make."

Mr. Murray made this proposition with some hesitancy and embarrassment, as if he feared Mr. Allen might feel that he was asking too much.

"I should be only too glad to have him continue with me, and I will do my best for him for another year."

"Thank you. Of course, I shall want my son to make his home with me now, but his time for the present shall be his own; he shall study all that he chooses, and he

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shall come to you for recitation whenever you are at liberty. He has had a hard time of it so far, but I hope he will find more enjoyment in life after this."

Mr. Murray was surely acting very generously, and his words sounded very fine.

Mr. Murray insisted upon taking Louis out for a holiday, and hoped Mr. Allen would have no trouble in securing the services of some one to supply his place in the office.

Louis donned his cap, and went out with his newly found father with a sensation of real pleasure, his doubts and distrust fast melting away beneath the fascination of his genial presence.

Mr. Murray's first act was to take him to a first-class tailor and have him fitted with a fine suit of clothes, a stylish hat, and neat gloves; and as Louis contemplated the change which all these nice things made in him, he could not help betraying something of the satisfaction he experienced.

An elaborate dinner at Young's followed, during which his father made himself most agreeable and entertaining, while in the evening they went to see Booth in "Hamlet," and Louis began to think that the future would be very bright for him.

After the play they took a carriage, and were driven to a handsome house near Franklin Square, where they were joined by two or three other gentlemen, who evidently were intimate friends of Mr. Murray, and to whom he introduced Louis as his son, explaining briefly how he had found him and his intentions regarding him in the future.

Wine and cigars were brought in, which were offered to Louis as well as the others; but our young friend, having been influenced by his faithful teacher to always shun them, declined, and sat quietly by while the others chatted, smoked, and drank.

After an hour passed thus, he was shown to an elegant apartment for the night, and when he found himself alone it all appeared so strange and unreal that it seemed like a dream.

He was so excited that it was a long while before he

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could go to sleep; but the drowsy god captured him at last and held him in thrall so completely that it was long past his usual hour of rising when he at last awoke.

The bells on some churches near were chiming seven, and he sprang out of bed in haste and was nearly dressed when there came a light tap at his door.

"Up, Louis?" queried a genial voice outside.

"Yes, sir," and he instantly unlocked and opened the door, and Mr. Murray stepped in, attired in a handsome dressing-gown, slippers, and smoking-cap.

"Well, how does it seem to live like sensible people?" he asked, in an easy, off-hand way.

"Everything is so new to me that I can hardly realize that I am myself; but this certainly is very comfortable and nice," Louis replied, glancing about the richly appointed room.

"Well, breakfast is ready, and we'll go down and have it hot," returned Mr. Murray, and, turning, he led the way down stairs, through a richly carpeted hall to a bright sunny dining-room on the east of the house.

The table was laid for two, and its snowy cloth, polished silver, and gleaming cut glass, made such a picture as Louis Dunbar had never looked upon before.

A smart colored waiter came at the call of the bell, bearing a tray on which was arranged a steaming and tempting breakfast, to which ample justice was done by those for whom it had been prepared.

After the meal was over, Mr. Murray led Louis to a room on the front of the house, which appeared to be a sort of sitting or reading-room, for papers and periodicals of various kinds lay upon the table.

Mr. Murray lighted a cigar, took up a morning paper, and, telling Louis to help himself to whatever he liked, was soon deeply interested in the morning news.

Louis felt uneasy; he had led such a busy, active life that he was entirely out of his element to sit thus idly down to amuse himself; but he felt as if it would seem ungrateful to show any dissatisfaction with his new position thus early, so taking up the latest magazine, he soon forgot himself in an interesting article on "Ancient and Modern Architects."

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After a while Mr. Murray arose, saying:

"I am obliged to go out for a couple of hours, Louis; but if any one comes in, just tell him I'll be back about ten."

Several gentlemen came in during the forenoon, walking in with a freedom which astonished Louis, and inquired for his father. Upon being told he was out, they amazed him still further by coolly walking through the room and ascending a flight of stairs, which until then he had known nothing about.

One or two even sat down to read the news with as much freedom as if they had been masters there, and our young friend thought his father must live a wonderfully free-and-easy life to allow his acquaintances to roam thus at will over his residence.

Some of these people he did not like the appearance of at all, and they regarded him with a keenness and inquisitiveness that was far from agreeable.

Mr. Murray did not return until noon, when they dined together in a social manner, after which he remarked that Louis could occupy his time as he chose until evening, as he had a business engagement that would employ him most of the afternoon.

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## CHAPTER X.

### A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

A couple of weeks passed, during which Mr. Murray was as kind and genial toward Louis as at first, giving him plenty of leisure and liberty, and often asking him to some place of amusement, while he was supplied with every comfort and luxury which an apparently full purse could procure.

But after a time, the novelty having worn off, Mr. Murray began to ask him to do little services about the house, such as attending the door and the gentlemen who were in the habit of coming there so much, carrying drinks and cigars to them as they lounged about a room in the second story, which seemed to be set apart for this purpose.

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Louis wondered at so many people coming and going, and secretly rebelled against serving liquors to them.

He abhorred intoxicating drinks of all kinds, and he felt himself degraded by dealing them out to other people.

Upon two or three occasions he had seen his father somewhat the worse for drink, and his respect for him had diminished considerably; yet he felt himself too much of a stranger as yet to expostulate with him, and so bore his mortification in silence.

He went every day to recite to Mr. Allen, but that gentleman had begun to notice a change in his pupil. He saw that he was growing very grave and thoughtful, while his interest in his studies seemed to diminish, and his recitations were often poor and unsatisfactory.

One morning the boy came to him looking very pale and greatly distressed.

Mr. Allen wondered what the cause of it could be, but did not like to question him, feeling sure that if he wished to confide in him he would do so unsolicited.

He could not refrain from remarking, however, as Louis passed him his open book:

"I am afraid you are not as well as usual to-day, Louis; pray do not feel obliged to recite if you are not able."

Louis lifted his heavy eyes to the friendly gaze of his teacher for an instant, then dropped them half guiltily, and grew a burning crimson.

All at once he burst out, desperately:

"Mr. Allen, I am perfectly wretched!"

"Why, my boy, what can have occurred to make you so? I thought your life was opening very brightly before you," returned his friend, in astonishment.

"I know it did seem very promising when I first left you; but everything is changed, and I cannot live so any longer."

"Live how?" queried Mr. Allen, more and more surprised.

"I suppose I might as well make a clean breast of everything to you, for you can help me out of my trouble if any one can.

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"Things have seemed very queer to me," he continued, after a moment's pause, "ever since I went away from here. Mr. Murray was very kind to me at first, though I could not understand his having such a stream of company all the time, nor the way the house was managed. But my eyes have gradually been opened, and last night I overheard a conversation which made me resolve that I would not live in that way any longer.

"Last night I was not feeling as well as usual. There had been a perfect stream of people in during the evening—men coming and going all the time, and some of them pretty hard-looking men, and I don't know how many glasses of liquor I carried up stairs—so many that I grew positively sick with the smell of it. At last I stole away, thinking I would go to bed, and get away from the smoke and confusion. I must have been very absent-minded, though, for I went up two flights of stairs instead of one, and did not discover my mistake until I tried the handle of the door to my room, as I supposed. I was astonished to find it locked; but what added to my surprise was that a small panel was slid one side while I stood there, and somebody's face appeared at the opening. I was asked what I wanted, and then the person within, seeming to recognize me, gave a short laugh, and said:

"'Oh, it's you, is it, youngster? Guess you've made a slight mistake; you'd better go down another flight.'

"The panel was then slipped into its place again, but a moment later I heard a roar of laughter from several voices within the room, accompanied by the jingling of money, and then I began to have an idea of what was going on.

"I grew cold all over with the terrible thought that suddenly came upon me—I was in a gambling-house, and my father, I felt sure, was the proprietor, or at least the manager of the concern, and everything which had so puzzled me before was now explained.

"My first impulse was to walk instantly out of the place, run away from the city, and hide myself from everybody. Then I thought of you and all my plans for study, and I hadn't the courage to go.

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"I hurried down stairs, but the thought of going to bed was hateful to me then; I knew I could not sleep, and I did not know what to do with myself.

"Over the front hall there is a little room which is used as a sort of store-room for trunks, boxes, etc.; there is no door to it, and it is only shut off from the hall by heavy draperies. I groped my way in there, and finding a broken arm-chair in the farther corner, I stowed myself away in it, and tried to think of some way out of the fix I was in. Live in a gambling-house, I would not, nor become identified with the class of people who frequented it.

"I must have been there half an hour or more, when I heard people coming up stairs. There were two men, and they stopped just outside of the little room where I was sitting. They were talking in a very low tone, but all at once I heard Mr. Murray say:

" 'Come in here—no one ever comes here—and we can talk undisturbed.'

"He pushed the curtain aside, and the two men seated themselves upon a trunk near the entrance, never dreaming there was any one near to overhear their conversation.

" 'I'm afraid he's going to prove a tough customer, Black,' I heard Mr. Murray say; 'he has some high notions, and I doubt his working in here among us as well as we imagined.'

" 'Yes, he isn't much like the majority of street gamins —it's a wonder, too, left as he has been, to shift for himself all these years. I reckon the only thing for you to do is to assert your paternal authority and make him do what you wish,' said the other.

" 'It must soon come to that; but he has a snug little sum saved up that I want to get hold of first. I overheard him and that old farmer talking it over between them that first day I went after him. It'll help a good way toward putting in those improvements we spoke of —I mean the new faro fixins.'

" 'Humph! the law would give you the control of all his earnings as long as he is a minor,' cried Black.

" 'I know that, but I'd rather get hold of them peace-

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ably if I can. I don't want to do anything to anger him. We want to get him identified with us—get him entangled so that he won't dare to betray or cut away from us for fear of getting nabbed himself; then we can manage him as we please.'

"'You are right, Murray. He's a mighty smart chap, and if you only work him up to it, he'll make a fine dealer for us by and by.'

"'Yes, he could be useful to us in a great many ways, only I'm afraid he's too conscientious.'

"'He'll get over that when we've sprung a trap or two on him, so that he'll stand in fear of being arrested. I'll trump up something before another week is out, and then we'll have our fine little gentleman just where we want him.'

"'Well, I only hope I can get hold of that money of his before that; but he has such a quiet, dignified way about him, that it takes me down in spite of myself.'

"'Ha! ha!' laughed Black, 'that's a fine feeling for a father to have toward his own son.'

"They then fell to talking over some of their own plans regarding more effectually concealing their illegal business, and they sat there so long that it seemed as if I should never be able to move again, I was so cramped from sitting in one position. But they got up and went away at last, and I stole to my room, feeling as if I never could wait for morning to come. Now, Mr. Allen, what shall I do? I can never go back to that house again—I can never call that man father, nor accept another favor from him, knowing how he makes his money. I would rather never have an education—rather not live at all, if I have got to receive it from him or be associated with him in any way, I have vowed to be an honest, respectable man, and that I cannot be if I go back there. What shall I do?" Louis concluded, looking up at his friend in deep distress.

"You can come back to me," Mr. Allen began.

"May I? Would you have me?" the boy interrupted eagerly.

"Yes, indeed; and be glad to get you again," returned the lawyer, smiling.

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"But will I be allowed? Will not the law compel me to go with that man?"

"I suppose, according to law, you are bound to him until you are of age. A father is his son's natural guardian; but, under the circumstances, I think we can arrange matters so that Mr. Murray will be perfectly willing to relinquish his claim upon you and allow you to remain with me. The man is, without doubt, a gambler," continued Mr. Allen, "and is engaged in keeping a regular gambling den, and he will be likely to concede a great deal rather than have that fact made public."

Mr. Allen turned to his desk and at once wrote a brief note to Mr. Murray, requesting his immediate presence at his office.

This he at once dispatched by a trusty messenger, and a couple of hours later Mr. Murray made his appearance, greatly to Mr. Allen's satisfaction, though Louis could not help quaking somewhat in view of the coming storm.

He entered the room smiling and affable, but looked a trifle disconcerted upon perceiving the grave and dignified demeanor of the lawyer and the pale and averted face of Louis, who did not even glance up to acknowledge his presence.

Mr. Allen politely requested him to be seated, and then as briefly as possible revealed to him what Louis had learned the previous evening, relating in substance the conversation that had passed between him and his accomplice, and then concluded by stating that Louis had decided that he would not remain with him, and utterly refused to be identified with him in any way—that he preferred to return to his old home and work for his own living, as he had always done.

Mr. Murray instantly flew into a violent passion, swearing and blustering at a fearful rate for a while, and declaring that this was all a plot on the part of Mr. Allen to get Louis back again into his employ, simply because he missed his valuable services.

He had it all his own way for a time, Mr. Allen sitting quietly by and waiting until his anger began to cool.

He finally turned to Louis and declared that he was

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his legal guardian—that he should return to him, and promise him obedience in whatever way he saw fit to direct.

But to this the young man firmly replied:

"No, sir; I shall not. You may be my father, and my legal guardian, as you say. But if you have disgraced yourself by becoming a gambler, and by leading others into such wickedness, I suppose I cannot help it. I can, however, help losing my own self-respect, and that of all good men, by refusing to be connected with you."

"It strikes me that you are rather insolent to your superiors, young man," returned Mr. Murray, between his teeth; "but you are a minor. You, and all you have, belong to me."

"That may be, sir," Louis quietly responded; "you may have the law on your side, but there is no power that can compel me to lead a dishonorable life; if you will relinquish your illegal and disreputable business, and go into something honorable, I should be willing to work heartily with you, and render you the obedience of a son. Under no other circumstances will I have anything to do with you."

Mr. Murray glared savagely at him.

"Perhaps you intend to betray me, and send the 'cops' down upon me, if I don't promise to mend my ways," he said, angrily.

"No, sir; if you will let me alone—allow me to remain quietly here with Mr. Allen, as heretofore, I will not meddle with your affairs at all; but if you drive me into a corner, I shall tell the whole story," Louis answered with decision.

"You are an obstinate youngster."

"I am obstinate in this way: I prize my good name and character more than anything else in this world, and I will not have either compromised, if I can help it."

"What will you give me to let you off?"

"I do not understand you, sir," Louis returned, with a proud uplifting of his head. He was not going to buy his good name.

"If I give you your time, I ought to have some com-

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pensation, for I could have made you very useful during the next four or five years."

A look of intense scorn spread over the young fellow's face.

"I suppose you refer to the small sum of money that I have earned and saved," he said, coolly. "The 'snug sum' you told your companion, last night, you wanted to get hold of."

"Well, I think I am entitled to something, since you refuse to give me your services," returned the man, suddenly, with a sheepish air.

"Where are all the means that you boasted of when you came to claim Louis as your son?" Mr. Allen here interposed, indignantly. "Where is all the money you were going to lavish on his education?"

"Pah! talk is cheap when you have an object to attain," retorted the gambler, now growing reckless. "I have my ups and downs in life like everybody else; but I happen just now to be in need of a few hundreds, and if Louis will hand over what he has saved, and promise secrecy regarding what he has seen and heard during the last few weeks, I'll agree to let him off; he can go on with you as usual."

Mr. Allen arose from his chair, boiling over with righteous indignation.

"We will end this interview right here, now," he said, sternly. "Not one dollar of the boy's money shall you have, and let me say that if you interfere with him in the future in any way, you shall answer for it before a tribunal which, I am very sure, you are anxious to avoid. Go, sir!"

The enraged lawyer pointed to the door, and the man, cowed, in spite of himself, slunk out, muttering indistinctly, but threateningly, and Louis and his friend were left once more to themselves.

"Now, my boy," said Mr. Allen, heaving a sigh of relief, "I do not believe he will trouble you further; there is nothing a gambler fears more than to have the authorities set upon his track; I think the main object of the man in claiming you for his son was, he thought he could work you into his nefarious business and make

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money out of you. But I don't imagine he will trouble you further, so we will resume our relations and go on as if nothing had happened to interrupt them."

Louis expressed his satisfaction at the result of the interview, though, unlike Mr. Allen, he did not feel quite sure that he would have no trouble in the future.

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## CHAPTER XI.

### LA PETITE AMERICAN.

Louis Dunbar—for he had refused to adopt the name of Murray, notwithstanding he felt that it rightly belonged to him—remained with Mr. Allen for three years after the events recorded in our last chapter.

They brought plenty of hard work to him, and small reward pecuniarily, though he realized that he was reaping a rich mental harvest, for he was making rapid strides in his education, and chiefly through his own efforts and perseverance.

Twice during this time he had encountered his discarded father. Once he learned indirectly that the authorities had discovered and swooped down upon his gambling den, and that he had been arrested as its proprietor. He hunted him up, found that everything he owned had been confiscated, and a fine imposed upon him. This he could not pay, because his partner, Black, had absconded, taking with him all their funds.

He seemed inclined to accuse Louis of having put the police upon his track, but the young man gravely and positively denied all knowledge of the affair, and offered to procure his release if he would promise to abandon his illegal practices.

He sullenly assented to this condition, but would not accept Louis' offer to procure him respectable employment, and for many months the young man knew nothing of his movements. At length, however, he sent him word that he was in trouble again, and this time Louis found that he had been arrested for drunkenness. Again he paid his fine, and, as the man was destitute of funds, he gave him sufficient money to provide for the necessi-

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ties of a week, during which time he hoped he would find means for supporting himself, and after that he heard nothing more of him for several years.

Louis was now in his twentieth year, but he was as mature as many men are at twenty-five, or even thirty, while he possessed a capacity for business that surprised Mr. Allen.

He had begun to think of the law as a profession for himself when he should have completed his other studies, and he interested himself in many of the cases which came to his employer, and not infrequently expressed opinions which that gentleman did not think beneath him to heed.

One day a friend of Mr. Allen's came into his office for a social chat, and while there broached the subject of stocks—telephone stock particularly, over which there was beginning to be considerable excitement, and in which he confessed he had invested quite largely.

Louis pricked up his ears at once at the rather astonishing stories which this enthusiast was relating regarding the telephone, and secretly resolved that he would look into the matter for himself. Perhaps here was the very opportunity to make the prosperous turn upon fortune's wheel which he had been wishing for so long.

After his visitor had departed, he questioned Mr. Allen further upon the subject, and asked what he thought about investing in some of the stock.

"I think I shall risk something in this new enterprise, Louis; it looks inviting and promising, and I believe the telephone will prove to be one of the most important inventions of our generation. I do not approve of speculations as a rule," he added; "I should never think of 'putting up a margin,' or 'dealing in futures'—I consider such operations no better than gambling; but purchasing legitimate stock, with the expectation of getting a fair interest for the money invested, seems to me perfectly honorable, although, of course, there is always some risk in it; but so there is in business of almost every kind."

From that hour Louis became absorbed in the history of the telephone. He procured whatever information he could, and thoroughly studied the whole subject. He

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looked into all its possibilities, visited various offices, questioned operators, inventors, and stockholders, until he knew the whole thing through and through, and was posted upon every point.

Then one day he paid a visit to Farmer Brown, drew his small capital from his hands, and invested every dollar of it in telephone stock.

So interested, so absorbed, did he become in this new invention, that he dissolved his connection with Mr. Allen, and entered one of the offices established in the city, with the intention of making himself a master in the business.

He proved himself peculiarly adapted to it, rising step by step until he attained a responsible position. To those familiar with the history of the telephone it will not seem incredible that at the end of two years Louis had acquired, by the careful handling of his small capital, the sum of five thousand dollars, and had also been waited upon by some of his superior officers with the proposition that he should go abroad in the interests of the company.

"Isn't he rather young to be intrusted with such responsible business?" one of the directors had asked, when his name was mentioned for the position.

"He is young in years," was the reply; "but he has an old head on his shoulders."

So to Europe Louis Dunbar went in the interests of the company, with an adequate salary, and rare opportunities for enriching himself by careful manipulation of the valuable stock of which he was a representative, and Paris was to be his headquarters.

Louis was delighted with Paris—it was such a grand and clean-looking city, with its broad, beautiful streets, its lofty buildings, and everything on a scale so magnificent and imposing.

His life was a very busy one, for he was bound to do his very best for his company, and he entered into his new occupation with his whole heart, and everything promised to prove successful.

But many things were to happen to him in this strange country.

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One day, not many weeks after his arrival, he was passing through the Champs Elysées, when a carriage, containing a gay party, suddenly rolled past him.

Involuntarily he glanced up at its occupants, and then felt a sudden thrill run through every nerve, as he caught a glimpse of a fair, delicate face, with eyes of wonderful blue, looking out from a mist of shimmering golden hair.

A sweet, silvery laugh rang out when the carriage was gone, and he stood gazing blankly after it, striving to collect his scattered wits and to grasp and trace the thread of memory which had thus been wafted toward him.

It was in vain, however; he could place neither face nor voice, and day after day he was haunted by the remembrance of it.

One evening, some weeks later, he attended a benefit concert given by amateur artists, both foreign and native, in the interests of some charitable organization.

More to pass the time than anything else—for his evenings were often lonely—Louis had resolved to go and to contribute his mite to a cause so worthy.

The programme promised to be very entertaining, for there were Italian, German and French artists, while one song was advertised by "La Petite American."

Louis wondered who this could be—no name had been allowed to appear, and this fact of itself aroused his curiosity.

Before "La Petite American's" turn arrived, Louis became aware that a pair of opera-glasses were leveled at him from a box on his right at some distance from him. At first he did not mind them, but as time after time they were lifted and brought to bear exactly upon him, he could not help thinking that some one was interested in studying his physiognomy, and finally, becoming annoyed at the persistent scrutiny, he lifted his own glass and returned fire.

This act brought into distinct view a box containing three occupants—a lady of perhaps forty-five years, accompanied by another of twenty-two, and a gentleman

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about his own age, and this latter was the individual who had been observing him so closely.

When he saw Louis' glass raised and brought to bear in his direction, he immediately dropped his and turned to speak to the young lady sitting beside him, and thus Louis obtained a good view of him.

He started as he looked. He knew that face. He recognized those keen, dark eyes, with their supercilious stare, that rather narrow brow, with its masses of raven hair lying above it, and those thin, aristocratic lips, which always wore a half-contemptuous expression.

It was the face of Arthur Aspinwall, his former classmate and the bully of the school which he had attended when he was living with Farmer Brown. He could not fail to know him, for Arthur had changed very little, except to grow older and somewhat more polished in appearance.

His companions he did not recognize, if, indeed, he had ever seen them before, though he could not fail to observe that the younger lady was a brilliant and beautiful brunette, whose every movement indicated ease and grace.

While he looked, all three turned expectantly toward the stage and Louis glanced at his programme.

It was time for "La Petite American" to appear, and at that very moment the curtain arose.

An instant later a slender, graceful figure, clad in glistening folds of pale-blue satin, emerged from behind a screen at the left of the stage and glided to her position before the footlights.

Louis Dunbar held his breath, while a thrill shot through every nerve. He had never seen any one before who had seemed so beautiful to him.

The maiden was perhaps twenty years of age; her complexion was like wax, except for a delicate bloom on either cheek; her eyes were so bright and lustrous that he could not discern their color, while her hair was like a halo of sunshine above her pure white brow.

Her dress was cut low at the neck, and was sleeveless, but both arms and neck were shaded by folds of soft,

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white tulle, and gleamed like polished marble beneath the delicate lace.

Like a flash it came to Louis who she was.

She was the vision who had shot by him that day in the Champs Elysees, and whose face and silvery laughter had haunted him ever since.

It was the face of a little maiden which had been stamped so indelibly upon his youthful heart that he could never forget it, and he knew that he was gazing upon Margaret Houghton.

She had come forward modestly, yet without a vestige of embarrassment, and stood calmly waiting while the orchestra played the prelude, then sounds of sweetest melody rose from that white, delicate throat and floated away among those lofty, gilded arches, while every listener sat spell-bound by her beauty and enthralled by the gifted voice.

She was not a Patti nor a Titien, nor even a Jenny Lind; but she was a sweet, unaffected maiden, with a magical power of song, and she sent forth those pure, sweet tones as freely as a bird that, forgetful of everything save the God-given impulse within him, allows his notes to trill and quiver and float up to heaven in joy and grateful praise for the gift within him.

Not a sound, save her song and its subdued accompaniment, was audible in that great house, and at length when her difficult aria was finished, she retreated with a modest grace that was simply charming.

Enthusiastic applause followed, long and resolute, too, showing that the delighted multitude was not to be satisfied with one appearance of the fair American, and she was forced to come before them again, though it was evident that she did so reluctantly, and she sang a simple French ballad to her French audience, and then, amid a shower of exotics, she bowed a smiling but resolute farewell and retreated again.

Louis Dunbar's mind went back over the past to that ragged, barefooted boy who stood one day looking between the bars of an iron gate at a sweet, blue-eyed little girl who was so tender and pitiful toward him; to a night in midwinter where in a country schoolhouse this

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same beautiful maiden had exonerated him from an unjust suspicion and restored him to the confidence and respect of his teacher and companions.

He thought, too, of that childish letter that she had written him later, and which had been such an inspiration to him all his life; she had said "she hoped she should meet him again when she returned from Europe, and should be glad to call him her friend."

He wondered if she would be glad to meet him now; if, indeed, she remembered him at all after all these years.

She must have been abroad ever since that time, but he had not thought to find her here in Paris. It was a delightful surprise to him; it aroused all his boyish reverence and admiration for her, and he resolved that he would make himself known to her and ascertain if she would still be willing to recognize him as a friend.

He imagined that the elder lady, whom he had seen in the box with Arthur Aspinwall, must be Mrs. Houghton, for he had not failed to remark the eagerness, mingled with something of anxiety in her manner, as she turned toward the stage just before Margaret's appearance.

He watched them when the concert was over, and was confirmed in this belief as he saw the whole party making their way toward the stage entrance.

Very quietly he followed them, and finally saw them disappear within a room at the end of a passage.

For a moment he stood irresolute, the fear that he might be guilty of an unwarrantable intrusion holding him back.

The next he walked boldly to the door and knocked for admittance; it was his only opportunity, he told himself; if he should let them go, they would be lost among the hosts of that great city, and he would, perhaps, never see them again.

His knock was answered almost immediately by a maid, who, perceiving that he was a stranger, regarded him curiously.

Louis had not, unfortunately, a single card with him, so he was forced to say:

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"Will you kindly ask Miss Houghton if she will receive a countryman and an old acquaintance?"

The maid disappeared, but soon returned, smiling and saying in her broken English:

"*Oui monsieur;* mademoiselle vera happy to welcome old friends," and with these words she ushered him into the brilliantly lighted room.

## CHAPTER XII.

### ASPINWALL'S INSOLENCE.

The beautiful songstress of a half-hour before was standing in the center of the room, surrounded by her friends, who were congratulating her upon her success.

She turned from them as Louis entered, stepped forward with charming ease and grace, and raised her lustrous eyes to his face.

For a moment she stood in doubt, but before he had an opportunity to introduce himself a bright smile lighted her features, and frankly extending her hand to him, she said, cordially:

"You are very much changed, but I am sure it must be Mr. Dunbar, whom I last met on the evening after that memorable sleigh-ride."

"You are right, Miss Houghton," Louis answered, giving that small hand a graceful clasp; "and it is very good of you to remember me. I hardly expected to be recognized."

"I seldom forget a face," she replied. "But come and let me introduce you to my friends."

"Mamma," she continued, turning to the lady whom Louis had seen in the opera-box with Arthur Aspinwall, "this is Mr. Louis Dunbar, whom I met five or six winters ago, when Ada and I were visiting at Mr. Aspinwall's."

"Ah, yes; I remember," graciously responded Mrs. Houghton, as she, too, heartily greeted her handsome young countryman, and recalled to mind the good things that she had heard of him so long ago.

"And you will find an old acquaintance in this young

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lady," Margaret went on, putting her arm about her fair friend, and drawing her toward her visitor; "Miss Ada Parker, Mr. Dunbar."

Louis would never have known the brilliant little brunette, for she had changed past all recognition; but he acknowledged the presentation with evident pleasure.

"This gentleman, I am sure, needs no introduction," pursued the young girl, smilingly; "of course you will remember him, since you were so long classmates at school.

She had evidently forgotten all the unpleasantness, or, if she did remember it, she was very gracefully striving to conceal the fact; and Louis, willing to let by-gones be by-gones, approached Arthur with outstretched hand and a genial smile upon his fine face.

But the young man drew haughtily back, lifted his eyeglass and scanned him curiously, after which he bowed stiffly and turned away.

Louis flushed crimson at his insolence, while Miss Houghton shot a flashing glance of disapprobation at Arthur; then with a defiant toss of her pretty head, she turned to her guest and began a torrent of questions regarding his life during the years since she had seen him, speaking tenderly and longingly of "dear old Boston," and ended by expressing her surprise at his being in Paris at the present time.

They became so absorbed in their conversation that Mrs. Houghton at last playfully interrupted them, saying:

"Margie, you are forgetting the lateness of the hour, and we shall soon be deserted in this great building; besides, you must remember you have eaten nothing for several hours. Pray invite Mr. Dunbar to come and take supper with us, and then continue your chat afterward."

"Yes, do, Mr. Dunbar," said Miss Houghton, eagerly. "Thank you, mamma, for suggesting it. And"—with a mischievous glance at Arthur, who was seated in dignified silence at the farther side of the room—"it will be an act of real charity on your part toward Mr. Aspinwall;

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it is so awkward, you know, for one gentleman to be obliged to escort three ladies."

Louis bowed and smiled his acceptance of this cordial invitation, although he caught the indignant and contemptuous flash which his former enemy shot at him for presuming to do so.

It did not disconcert him, however, nor deter him from offering his arm to Miss Houghton when she had donned her wraps and was ready to go, and young Aspinwall was thus left to escort the other two ladies, which he did in dignified silence.

Arriving at the luxurious and home-like apartments of the Houghtons, they found a dainty supper awaiting them, where, too, they found Mrs. Parker, Ada's mother, who had been suffering with a severe cold for several days, and was not able to attend the concert on that account.

Louis spent a couple of delightful hours with these friends, talking of home and their mutual acquaintances there, of the extended tour which the Houghtons had made, and of his own prospects.

He learned that they had been residing in the French capital for more than a year, Margaret having a desire to perfect herself more fully in art and avail herself of the unexampled advantages of the Louvre, while they were all studying the language and striving to acquire a correct pronunciation.

Three years they had spent in different portions of Italy—in Venice, Florence, Rome, where Margaret had been a diligent student of music; another year they had spent in visiting other countries, until they knew Europe fully as well as they knew America.

Mrs. Houghton said they were weary of travel, and would be glad to go home and settle down to a quiet life; but Mr. Houghton's appointment would not expire for another year, and so they would be obliged to content themselves with Paris as best they could.

Louis Dunbar's heart bounded at this intelligence. A whole year to bask in the sunlight of Margaret Houghton's smiles! Could he ask for any greater joy than that?

All his life, or at least ever since that well-remembered

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day of his birthday party, she had been his guiding star. He had worshiped her from afar heretofore, but now, tonight, when she had burst upon him in all her glorious beauty—when she had greeted him so cordially, taken him by the hand, and acknowledged him as an old friend—he had lost his heart entirely, and henceforth she would be a beautiful, lovable woman, whom, if Heaven willed, he would win for his wife, or he would never call any one by that sacred name.

"If you are to continue a resident of Paris, Mr. Dunbar, I hope we shall see you often," Miss Houghton said, when he at length rose to go.

"You are very kind," he answered, gratefully, "and since I am an entire stranger in this vast city, it will be a great pleasure and comfort to me if you will allow me to regard you as my friends, and drop in upon you occasionally."

"Do not put it that way, please," returned the young girl, laughing. "We will not only 'allow' you, but consider it a favor if you will come to us often. Our American acquaintances are few here in Paris."

"Let me second Margie's invitation, Mr. Dunbar," said Mrs. Houghton, gracefully. "Although this is our first meeting, I cannot regard you as a stranger. I heard so much of you several years ago from two little girls, who then made your acquaintance, that I have always had a curiosity and an earnest desire to know you."

This was all very gratifying to Louis, but to Arthur Aspinwall, who sat by and was obliged to listen to it, it was absolute torture.

The memories that were aroused by this mention of those old days stirred up all the evil within him, and made him curse the day and the object that had brought his hated enemy to Paris.

"Thank you," Louis returned, heartily, to Mrs. Houghton; "and since you are so good, I shall feel free to avail myself of your kindness. But I am afraid I am not beginning very well by remaining so late. I surely must not wear my welcome out on my first visit."

He took out his watch and glanced at the time as he spoke. As he did so Margaret's glance fell upon his

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chain, and she saw hanging from it a tiny golden dollar.

Involuntarily she lifted her eyes from it to his, and something in them told her that he had seen her look, and that he knew she had recognized the little gift that she had bestowed upon him so long ago, and a lovely conscious color shot over her fair face.

His own color deepened as he shook hands with her; then he took leave of the other ladies, bowed politely to Mr. Aspinwall, and went away, the sense of loneliness and homesickness, which he had hitherto experienced since his arrival in Paris, all gone, while he had a whole year of delight to look forward to now that he had found such congenial friends in this city.

"Well, Arthur," said Mrs. Parker to her nephew after Louis' departure, "for an old classmate, I must say, I think you treated Mr. Dunbar rather shabbily."

"My dear aunt, I have attended school with a great many people, and I hope I am not expected to take every one to my bosom indiscriminately whenever I chance to meet them," the young man returned, sarcastically.

"Well, but Mr. Dunbar seems such a fine young man; I do not know when I have been more prepossessed with any one."

"He is *very* handsome," interposed Ada, with a mischievous glance from her cousin to Margaret.

"Yes, and so gentlemanly," returned Miss Houghton, in perfect sympathy with the fun that she saw in her friend's eye.

Arthur Aspinwall colored angrily. He began to realize that he had been making himself ridiculous, and it nettled him exceedingly.

"Tastes vary in this world," he snorted, with a curling lip; "but then I've heard it said that girls were always ready to bestow their smiles upon a new face."

"Some flowers always turn their faces toward the sunlight," quickly answered Ada; "and let me tell you, my *dear* cousin, *I*, for one, am not fond of thunder-clouds; go, look at yourself, sir, in the glass, and then tell me if you think you are likely to attract *anything* but another thunder-cloud."

"Fie, Ada!" gently chided her mother, but the young

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lady, with a saucy glance at her discomfited cousin, twined her arm about Margaret's waist and drew her into another room to discuss their toilet for a brilliant *fête* which they were expecting to attend the following week.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### REJECTED AND DEJECTED.

Every one knows something of the history of the telephone—of its invention, the introduction, the rapid and wonderful rise of its stock, as well as the fortune which many people acquired by the careful manipulation of it.

Of course there were difficulties in the way of establishing it in new places, and it required push and energy to make it successful; but Louis Dunbar proved himself to be the right man in the right place, and his employers had reason to congratulate themselves upon having secured one so well adapted to further their interests.

He had not only worked well for his company, but he found many an oportunity to make money for himself, and bade fair to become, in time, the rich man that he had prophesied he would be.

But prosperity did not destroy the kindly nature that had always been his chief attraction; for, before he left his native city, he had provided handsomely for the good woman who had cared for him during his youth. He had slipped fifty dollars into her hand, upon bidding her farewell, exacting a promise from her that she would quit the wash-tub, take life easier, and put her boys into a good school, while he would make it his business to see that she had the same amount monthly, as long as he remained abroad and continued prosperous.

As soon as he could arrange his business satisfactorily in the French capital, he had set himself zealously at work to acquire the language. He found, to his surprise, that he possessed a peculiar gift in that direction, for he learned very readily. The Houghtons, too, were a great help to him, for he did not hesitate to avail himself of their cordial invitation and became a frequent visitor in their home; and, as they were already proficient in the

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language, he found that by conversing in French with them, his accent improved much faster than in trying to study with a teacher.

He was learning also other and sweeter lessons.

Every day Margaret Houghton became dearer to him. Every day he became more and more conscious that she had won the deepest homage of his nature, and that henceforth life would be unendurable unless he could win her for his wife and live in the sunlight of her sweet presence.

Yet grave doubts often arose in his mind whether he ought to seek her love; whether he ought to try to gain the regard of the beautiful girl, who all her life had been surrounded by an atmosphere so different from that in which he had been reared.

He felt that he never could offer her the name of Murray—every time he thought of it in connection with himself his cheek would burn with shame and humiliation. He the son of a gambler!—could he ever confess it to her? He shrank from the thought with loathing.

He finally resolved to allow matters to take their own course; if the family continued to receive him with favor—if Margaret continued to smile upon him, he would take courage and trust that those disagreeable matters over which he had no control would finally shape themselves.

But he found he had a formidable rival in Arthur Aspinwall.

It was strange, he thought, that this enemy of his youth should happen to cross his path again just at this most important era of his life.

That he was still his bitter foe there could be no doubt, for he availed himself of every opportunity to show his ill-will. He was openly slighting, almost insulting in his manner, excepting when they were both in Margaret Houghton's society.

At such times, since Louis appeared to be in such high favor, he curbed his dislike in a measure, but it was only because he feared to incur the displeasure of the woman whom he also loved.

He knew that Louis was rapidly mounting the ladder

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of fortune, and that, if Margaret should favor his suit, he would soon be able to offer a position of which no woman need be ashamed; while reports from home warned him that his father's affairs were in a very critical condition and that any day was liable to bring financial ruin upon him. His mother's letters were full of anxiety and distress, begging him to return and help his father bear his burdens, instead of spending so prodigally abroad and living in idleness.

He took no notice of these pleadings, however, but they made him all the more determined to win Margaret Houghton.

He resolved to play his strongest cards, and bring matters to a crisis, for besides her father's great wealth, to which she was the only heir, she was to come in possession, upon her marriage, of a hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars, a legacy left her by her father's only sister.

Accordingly, one day, after receiving a more doleful letter than usual from his mother, he repaired to the Houghton mansion, resolved upon putting his fate to the test.

He found Margaret in the music-room, practicing for some private theatricals that were to take place in about a fortnight at the house of a friend.

"I suppose I am interrupting you," he said, deprecatingly, "but I was homesick for the sight of our own folks; these French people, though amusing, tire me out after a while. But, if you don't wish to be disturbed I'll return to the parlor and wait until you are through."

"No, never mind; the practicing can wait for a while. I suppose it would do me no harm to rest, for I have been at it for nearly an hour now," Miss Houghton said, pleasantly.

"Then come and talk to me, do! for truly I am homesick," he pleaded, with a dejected air.

"Poor fellow! Why don't you go home, then?" laughed the fair girl, roguishly, for she had heard through Mrs. Parker of Mr. Aspinwall's misfortunes, and that he was anxious for his son's return.

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"I would, if you were going," Arthur replied with an earnest look into the lovely face.

"I? Oh, I've no notion of it," she replied, with animation. "I do not care to go home for a long while yet. Paris is delightful just now; we have made such pleasant acquaintances recently."

Arthur's face fell. He knew well enough that Paris had been much more delightful to her since Louis Dunbar's appearance there, although he had tried hard to ignore the disagreeable fact.

"How much longer do you expect to remain here?" he asked, jealously.

"I do not know. I suppose when papa is ready we shall have to go; but I must confess we are enjoying everything so much now that I am very well content."

"Then I shall have to remain also," he returned, shooting a tender glance at her. "I cannot tear myself away while you are here, Margaret."

"Now, Arthur, don't, pray don't let your 'homesickness' develop into a sentimental strain; if you do I shall go back to my practice forthwith," Margaret answered, lightly, but with heightened color.

"It is not simply sentiment, Margie," he said, earnestly; "can't you see—can't you understand that the love I have for you——"

"Arthur——"

"No, do not interrupt me, dear—you must hear me out now," he cried, as she half arose from her seat to leave him, and he laid a detaining hand upon her arm. "I have been learning to love you ever since you were a little girl and came to visit my mother with Ada. I have cherished the hope ever since that some time I would win your love. As soon as my college course was finished I persuaded my father to let me come abroad. My one aim was to find you, and I found you more beautiful than I had pictured you during all the years of your absence. Margie, you have become the one desire of my life; without you the future will be unendurable, with you as my wife I see possibilities before me that almost dazzle me. Darling, give me your promise to be mine; I will not hurry you; I will wait for you as long as you bid

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me, only give me your pledge that some day you will be my wife."

The earnestness of his tone, the eager, pleading look upon his face, told that this was a very serious matter with him, and indeed he did love her as well as it was possible for one of his shallow, selfish nature to love any one besides himself. Then, too, the critical state of his finances demanded that he should make a decided effort to provide for his future.

There was an awkward silence for a few moments after Arthur Aspinwall's impassioned declaration, then Margaret lifted her great lustrous eyes to his face and said, with a dignity that awed him in spite of his native self-possession:

"Arthur, you know that you ought never to have said this to me. I do not love you, and you knew that I did not before you spoke. Let me deal plainly with you once for all. Of course, I have seen from the first of your coming here that you cared for me—that was patent to every one; but from the outset I have discouraged your attentions whenever they overstepped the bounds of ordinary friendship. I have never allowed you to utter one word of love to me; I have repelled you whenever you have attempted to do so, and shown you in a hundred different ways that I did not reciprocate your affection. Consequently I feel that this sudden and forced declaration is unwarrantable. I could not be your wife, nor the wife of any man, unless I loved him with all the strength of my nature. Now, please, as you value my friendship, never refer to this again, for my decision is unalterable."

"Margaret Houghton, you are an iceberg!" cried the disappointed and baffled young man, passionately, while his face grew almost purple with repressed anger.

"No, I am not an iceberg," she replied, quietly. "If my rejection of your suit seems cold and indifferent, you have no one to blame save yourself, for you knew before you spoke that I could not conscientiously give you the pledge that you have asked me for."

"You would not have answered me in this frigid manner six months ago," Arthur burst forth, impetuously.

The lovely color deepened in the beautiful girl's cheeks.

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She could not fail to understand his implication, for six months before she had not met Louis Dunbar.

"Six months, or even a year ago, it would have been all the same," she returned, coldly. I have never regarded you otherwise than as a pleasant acquaintance or friend. Knowing this, as you could not fail to have known, how could you ever presume to ask me to become your wife?"

"Because I love you, and, Margie, I will teach you to love me in time, only give me the right to do so," he earnestly pleaded.

He really believed that she was necessary to his happiness, at the same time he could not afford to allow that coveted hundred and twenty-five thousand to slip through his fingers without making a desperate effort to secure it.

"Are you so sanguine?" she questioned, her red lips curling with something of scorn. "One can never be taught anything of the kind, true love always comes spontaneously into the heart."

"Has it come into yours?" he demanded, hotly. "Have you learned to love any one else?"

"Mr. Aspinwall," Margaret returned, drawing herself up proudly, "nothing can justify you in catechising me in this way."

"Forgive me," he said, penitently, seeing that he had made a grave mistake, "and attribute my thoughtless presumption to my bitter disappointment."

"Then please drop this subject for all time."

Her companion, after this request, did not attempt to pursue the forbidden subject, and soon after took his leave, feeling both angry and chagrined.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### A LONG-LOST RELATIVE.

The following week brought disastrous news to Arthur Aspinwall. His father had failed. His remittances would have to be stopped, and his mother strongly urged him to return, put his shoulder to the wheel of their

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fallen fortunes, and try to cheer his father in this dark hour of disaster.

"Go home and go to work to help support the family, that means," he muttered, angrily, as he crumpled in his hand the sheet, upon which his almost heart-broken mother had poured out her cares to him. "Not while I have my wits about me," he added, "if the old man has got into this—scrape, he may get out of it as best he can, without any help from me."

And having given vent to this unfeeling speech he forthwith set his wits to work, to see what could be done to help him out of his present difficulties.

Having always been the petted child of fortune, with every luxury provided for him and every whim gratified, it was a hard matter now to find himself in a strange country, almost penniless, and a future of poverty or hard work staring him in the face.

But something must be done and that speedily. Margaret Houghton had refused to marry him, and while she adhered to that decision there could be no hope of ever fingering her snug fortune.

What next? Work he would not—borrow he could not to any considerable extent, while every day his funds were being depleted. His case was indeed becoming desperate.

He said nothing to any one regarding the news of his father's failure; he hid all his anxiety and trouble under a gay exterior; and did not attempt to reform his extravagant habits, firmly believing that Fate would come to his aid in some mysterious way.

One morning, while promenading in the garden of the Tuileries, he encountered, in the main avenue, a distinguished looking gentleman whose face seemed unaccountably familiar to him.

He knew him to be an American at the first glance, although there were peculiarities about him indicating that he had lived abroad for many years perhaps.

He was tall and commanding in figure, with a grand though somewhat melancholy face, surmounted by abundant white hair, sad brown eyes, and a tender, sensitive mouth.

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There was also about him an air of opulence which did not fail to attract the young man's attention at once.

"He looks like my mother, as sure as I'm a beggar!" mentally ejaculated Arthur.

The stranger, too, had evidently been struck by the young man's appearance, for each, glancing back, could not fail to see that their interest was mutual.

Arthur Aspinwall suddenly halted in his walk, his face growing flushed and eager. He hesitated a moment, then swinging resolutely around, rapidly approached the figure he had just passed, saluted him politely, and addressed him in English.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said; "my mother had a brother whose name was Albert Forest; he disappeared from his home very mysteriously, years ago, and nothing has been heard from him but once since. You resemble her so strangely that I was impelled to address you. If I have made a mistake you will surely pardon me, and no harm will have been done; on the contrary, if I have found a relative I shall consider myself fortunate indeed."

"What is your name, young man?" queried the gentleman, in equally pure English, while he bestowed a scrutinizing glance upon the young man.

"Arthur Aspinwall, and my mother's name, before her marriage, was Gertrude Forest."

The gentleman extended his hand in the most cordial manner.

"I am Albert Forest," he said, "and I am convinced that you must be my nephew, although I am considerably astonished at this unexpected encounter. Come to my apartments, and we will converse further of this."

After a long conversation in the stranger's luxurious apartments on the Avenue de l'Opera, he ascertained that he was indeed the long-absent brother of his mother, and that he was returning to his native land after long years spent in the far East, where he had accumlated a large fortune.

"I offended my father," Albert Forest said, while explaining how he had happened to leave America, "first, by refusing to go through a college course and fit myself

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for some gentlemanly profession. I hated books, and I wanted to launch out at once into business for myself; he had a great contempt for anything like trade, but profound respect for a name and fame. Second—well, no matter what the other reason was; it is sufficient to say that I mortally offended him. He was a stern old man, and though I was his only son, he told me if I would not obey him I might take myself off and look after my own interests as best I could. I took him at his word, and——"

The gentleman paused here and appeared disturbed by some painful memory for a moment, for his face flushed and tears started to his eyes.

Then he resumed:

"And so, having a good opportunity offered me, I shipped on board a vessel bound for India, where I engaged in both the silk and wool trade, and where, too, I have lived a very lonely life. Once I returned, but upon learning that my father still cherished anger toward me, I made not attempt to see him, but sailed again for the foreign land, where I determined to stay until I should amass a fortune which even he could not despise. But he died years ago, my sisters married, and still I staid on. Six months ago, however, an unaccountable longing seized me to visit again the land of my birth; so, settling up my business in Calcutta and Bombay, I started, and arrived in Paris only a fortnight ago. That is my story in brief. Now tell me yours—what are you up to, young man, in this gay but wicked city?"

And Mr. Forest bent his searching eyes upon his nephew's face.

"Having a good time for a little while before beginning the real business of life," he responded, frankly, but with a conscious flush. "I finished my college course last year," he continued, "and father consented to my having a trip abroad before deciding what I would do in the future. But I suppose my good time is over, for I received a letter from home a few days ago saying that father had failed, and I must look out for myself after this."

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"Failed? That's bad. Well, what course have you decided upon?" queried Mr. Forest, gravely.

"I—I have not decided. I suppose I've got to turn my hand to something right away; but, Uncle Albert, to be plain with you, there is an attraction here in Paris from whom I find it very difficult to tear myself away."

"Aha! an attraction? Some girl you mean by that?" observed the gentleman, dryly.

"Yes, sir."

"I hope she isn't one of those painted, flirting Frenchwomen?"

"No, sir; she is an American—a girl whom I have admired ever since I was a boy."

"An American? What is her name?"

"Margaret Houghton. I don't know how I shall stand with her friends when it comes to be known that I haven't a dollar in the world and no prospects."

"Pshaw! any young man with health, strength, a good education, and plenty of Yankee energy, has the very best of prospects," retorted Mr. Forest, bluntly.

"Has the girl any money?" he asked, after a moment.

"A cool hundred and twenty-five thousand in her own right," replied Arthur, with a sigh.

"That's pretty well," observed his uncle, quietly; "but if the girl loves you she won't say you 'nay' because she happens to have a fortune and you haven't."

"No; only it doesn't give a fellow much courage to try his luck when he knows he's as poor as Job's turkey," responded Arthur, with a capitally simulated air of dejection.

"Then you are not engaged?"

"No, not yet; I'm afraid it would be hardly right—that I might be accused of taking an unfair advantage."

Arthur was feeling his way very cunningly and cautiously.

"Fol-de-rol!" was the impatient retort to this; "if she's worth anything she won't care about money, especially when she has so much of her own. I must see the girl; I should like you to have a good wife. Have you laid any plans about going back to America?"

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"No, sir; I have felt as if I were between two fires, and did not know which way to turn."

"Well, a little delay, more or less, won't matter now. You just write home that you have run across your mother's scapegoat of a brother, and that he wants to keep you with him for the present. I'll assume all responsibility," said Mr. Forest.

This plan was highly satisfactory to Arthur, who flattered himself that he had made a favorable impression upon his uncle, whom he fondly imagined to be a perfect nabob as to wealth.

He directed him to remove from the hotel where he had been stopping to some rooms adjoining his, and then the "generous old bach," as he styled him, finding that he still seemed somewhat depressed, crammed his purse with French gold, as if he imagined it to be the panacea for the most serious trouble.

Arthur immediately wrote to his mother what had transpired, but before another week had passed, and before his letter could possibly have reached his home, a dispatch by cable came announcing the death of both his parents.

His mother's health had been delicate for a long time; a sudden hemorrhage had brought the end very unexpectedly, and his father, prostrated by this added blow, had dropped dead, stricken by apoplexy, just as they were bearing his lost wife forever out of his sight.

This news was a great shock, both to Mr. Forest and to Arthur, who had truly and fondly loved his mother.

"Poor Gertrude!" Mr. Forest said, with tearful eyes, as he read the sad message, "this breaks the last home-tie for me; I wish I might have seen her once more. Poor boy!" he added, turning to Arthur, who was sitting with bowed head beside him, "it is very hard for you."

"Uncle Forest, I *can't* go home now; it would be too desolate!" exclaimed the young man, apparently broken down by excessive grief, though he was planning how he could make use of this "sudden visitation of Providence" to remain in gay, delightful Paris, where everything was so much more to his taste than in prosy, practical Boston.

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"Very well; it shall be just as you desire, for the present, Arthur," returned his uncle, sympathetically; "we could, of course, do no good by returning now, so we will remain where we are for a while. I suppose, however, when you get over this first grief you'll want to settle yourself in some kind of business; it is better for every one to have some object in life to occupy his time and attention."

"Of course," responded his nephew; "and perhaps you can help me to decide what will be for my best interest, and I shall be only too glad to be guided by your advice."

The first opportunity that presented itself, Arthur introduced his newly discovered relative to the Houghtons, and a mutual admiration society seemed to be likely to be formed immediately.

"Your Miss Margaret is a rare pearl, as her name indicates," Mr. Forest remarked one evening, after having passed several hours in that young lady's home. "How she sings!" he continued—"like a nightingale! She's a perfect delight to the eyes, too. I'd give half my fortune for such a daughter!"

"I suppose a niece would be next door to a daughter, wouldn't it?" observed Arthur, slyly.

"That's so, my boy; and if you can win her, I'll settle another hundred and twenty-five thousand upon you the very day she becomes your wife; while at my death, since you are my only living relative, I suppose you will come in for the rest of my money."

"I hope that won't be for many, many years, Uncle Albert; I trust that you will live long to enjoy the harvest you have reaped, and I will do all that I can to make the remainder of your days pleasant," returned Arthur, with apparent sincerity, though his heart had bounded with delight at his uncle's words.

If he could win Margaret Houghton, he would secure an independent fortune with her, and another for himself. A quarter of a million! He said it over and over again, and the words were like music in his ears.

"I will persist until I succeed. I could easily do it if Louis Dunbar were out of the way!"

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## CHAPTER XV.

### HEARTS THAT BEAT AS ONE.

An evening at the Grand Opera House.

All Paris is gathered there to hear the great Swedish songstress, Christine Nilsson, where she is to appear as *Ophelia* in "Hamlet," and never had a more brilliant throng assembled to witness the triumph of an artist who on this night was to bring joy supreme to two hearts and lives in which we are particularly interested.

Mrs. Houghton's party occupied a conspicuous box, and attracted much attention and admiration. Margaret Houghton had never looked more lovely than to-night, arrayed as she was in palest of pink silk, with great clusters of white roses and green leaves in her belt and clasped in her faultlessly gloved hands. Not a jewel could be seen upon her anywhere, but her peerless face, all aglow with a wondrous light and beauty, held every eye spell-bound as it was turned toward the box where she was sitting.

Mrs. Houghton looked regal in black velvet, relieved by diamonds of purest light, and appeared a supremely happy matron as she sat beside her handsome and dignified husband, whose glance often turned and lingered upon her with a fondness that is rare after more than twenty-five years of married life.

Ada Parker, bright, piquant little beauty that she was, looked like some gay bird from a southern clime in her dress of crimson satin, relieved by delicate white lace, and strings of pearls on her smooth, fair neck and arms; while Mrs. Parker, in lady-like gray, with ornaments of opals and diamonds, was not by any means the least attractive of the party.

The only other occupant of the box was Louis Dunbar, who sat a little in the rear of Margaret Houghton, and who, if one could judge by the expression of his face, was more absorbed in his fair companion than in the vocalism of the great prima donna.

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"What a grand, magnificent voice she has!" Margaret said, with a deep, indrawn breath, after a superb effort of the great songstress, while she lifted her lustrous eyes to the handsome face beside her.

"She has, indeed," Louis assented, but meeting her look with a glance that sent the rich blood bounding to her cheek.

"Do you know," she went on, but dropping her white lids a trifle, "when I hear such a voice as that, I am thrilled through and through; every fiber of my being is stirred, and I feel a deep and tender affection going forth from my heart toward the singer. Were you ever affected like that?"

A brilliant light flashed over Louis Dunbar's face as his mind reverted to that evening when he had heard the fair girl beside him sing to a no less appreciative audience than was gathered around them to-night—when she had startled him with her beautiful presence, and then actually sung his heart forever out of his own keeping.

Leaning a trifle nearer her, he bent a thrilling glance upon her, and replied with an earnestness that made every pulse in her delicate body throb strangely:

"Yes, Miss Houghton, I *have*."

Something in his tone made her flash a quick look at him, and if ever a man's face betrayed a tender, yearning love, his did at that moment.

He knew it, but it was beyond his power to help it, and he saw that she recognized it by the shy drooping of the golden lashes and the rosy, conscious flush that again swept upward and was lost beneath the waves of her shining hair.

An expressive silence fell between them. Meanwhile the great songstress was being recalled by thundering applause, and then came forward to respond, bowing her thanks for the appreciation evinced by her audience.

There was an instantaneous hush, every being in that great house bending forward with breathless attention, eager to catch the first tone of that ravishing voice.

She sang a simple ballad—sweet, expressive, impassioned:

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"I love thee; I love but thee,
With a love that shall not die
Till the sun grows cold,
And the stars are old,
And the leaves of the Judgment books unfold."

To Louis Dunbar, sitting there, one shapely hand, resting lightly upon the back of his companion's chair, his eyes riveted upon the beautiful face that he loved so well. that song seemed like an open confession of the passion that was surging in his own heart for her—of the worship that, for weeks, he had been struggling for expression.

During the first verse Margaret's eyes were fixed upon the singer, but gradually the vocalist's blue orbs drooped until the white lids hid them entirely, while the soft lace which shaded her neck rose and fell with the quickened throbbing of her heart.

She could feel the trembling of that strong hand upon the back of her chair, and she knew that it was from an intensity of emotion which her lover was striving for the moment to curb. She knew that his soul, like her own, was responding to every sweetly intoned word, and a feeling of triumph took possession of her that the riches of a great, deep passionate, enduring love, such as this grand man was capable of bestowing, were all her own.

"I love thee; I love but thee,
With a love that shall not die
Till the sun grows cold,
And the stars are old,
And the leaves of the Judgment books unfold,"

caroled that magic voice in its last fond refrain, and then the gifted artist glided from the stage while her audience sat spell-bound as the last tone, so strangely, so almost painfully sweet, died dreamily away, leaving that great multitude enwrapped in a silence that was akin to the hush of death.

"Margaret," whispered an impassioned yet tender voice in Miss Houghton's ear.

The uterance of that beloved name had been involuntary; it broke from the lips of her eager lover almost before he knew it; the song had carried him out and

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beyond himself, and in that one word he had told her all that there was in his great heart.

Her sweet lips trembled, the hands that were toying with her elegant fan fell nervous upon her lap; then, as if attracted by some mysterious influence stronger than her own will, she raised her flower-like face, and for one brief second her glorious eyes flashed up to meet his.

Ah, me "thus the hands of invisible spirits touch the strings of that subtle instrument, the soul, and play the prelude of our fate." Here were

> "Two hearts in sweet accord,
> Each for each caring,"

lost to time and place, and all things save that they loved and were beloved.

One blissful moment those fine brown eyes held the blue, then the quick, modest, maiden flush told that the startled girl feard she had betrayed too much.

But Louis Dunbar had read the tender secrets in his darling's brief glance and his heart had leaped with its transport of joy.

He had won her. He felt it in his soul. He knew that henceforth she would be all his own; and, thus crowned with glory of her priceless love, he felt richer than any king.

Just as the parties were passing out of the opera house they were joined by Arthur Aspinwall and Mr. Forest.

Arthur ignored the fact that Louis and his uncle were utter strangers, even though he saw that the latter evidently desired an introduction after he had greeted the others of Mrs. Houghton's party, while this marked neglect caused the quick blood to leap to Louis' face, and placed him in an exceedingly awkward situation for a moment.

He was struck by the noble face and bearing of the stranger, while something in the keen, yet kindly glance which Mr. Forest had bestowed upon him, made him instinctively trust him, and recognize in him a congenial spirit even before he knew him.

Mrs. Houghton, observing Louis' embarrassment, has-

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tened to perform the introduction which Arthur had purposely avoided, and then, after a few moments spent in friendly chat in the vestibule, they separated, going their different ways.

Upon reaching home Mrs. Houghton gave Louis a cordial invitation to "come in for a while," and then excusing herself, upon the plea that she had some orders to give the servants, she passed directly up stairs, giving her husband a hint to follow.

Louis led his fair companion into the parlor, where, with tender hands, he removed her cloak and hat; then bending down to look into the sweet flushed face, he whispered:

"My darling, I love you with a love that shall not die

> 'Till the sun grows cold,
> And the stars are old,
> And the leaves of the Judgment books unfold.'

And not even then shall it die, dear," he continued, passionately, "for it is a love that must last throughout eternity, because it has become a part of my very soul. Margaret, my pearl, my fair, white New England lily, have not your eyes already told me that I need not sue for your love in vain? I believe so; but, dearest, let me hear your lips confirm it, then my cup will be full."

He knew what her answer would be, for there could be no mistaking the light on that fair, beautiful face, and he drew her into a fond, close embrace, laying one hand lovingly, yet nervously, upon her golden head, his whole being thrilling with the mighty love that filled his heart.

And she? She stood for one minute thus encircled, then she lifted her tender face to his, while tears trembled upon her golden lashes—tears of wondrous joy which this grand inspiring love had called to her eyes.

"Louis! Louis!" she murmured, and the very intonation of his name betrayed an affection as deep and true as his own.

There was no need of words; each knew that each belonged to the other for all time. Ay, and if in the misty future wedded souls could belong to each other—for all eternity, too.

"From the moment of our first meeting, love—from

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that hour when you thrust this dear hand between the iron bars of your father's gate and dropped this little coin in the dust at my feet—you have been the lodestar that has drawn me onward and upward toward an honorable manhood, toward success and—yourself," Louis said a little later, when both had become more familiar with the new, great happiness that had come to them.

"Ah, Louis, you must have been already somewhat charged with honor and manliness, else you could have been drawn neither upward nor onward," Margaret replied, with such fondness that he could not resist bestowing an appreciative caress upon the lips that had given utterance to the tender words.

"Margaret," Louis said, suddenly and very gravely, "I am afraid I have done wrong in not telling you before this is what I know of my history; there is one blot upon my life which may make you hesitate to give yourself to me."

"A blot upon your life?" she repeated, lifting her startled eye to his face and growing slightly pale.

"Well, not exactly that, perhaps; but a blot upon a life connected with mine."

"Ah, that is different!" she said with a sigh of relief. "So long as you are good and true, what others may have done cannot affect you."

Tears sprang to the strong man's eyes at these words, for nothing could be more touching and beautiful than this pure, unselfish love that he had won for his simple worth alone.

But he told her all his story, not omitting the fact that his father was a man of whom he had reason to be ashamed, and with whom he could never be associated in any way, except to relieve his necessities if he should ever need such relief.

"What he has done or what he is cannot affect you personally, dear," she said, with tender sweetness, when he had concluded; "it is Louis Dunbar whom I love and whose wife I hope to be."

For answer the young man bent forward and touched those sweet, red lips with his own. He had no language

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with which to answer her words of simple faith and noble trust.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### HOW ARTHUR "ENJOYED HIMSELF."

"I imagine that young Dunbar, to whom Mr. Houghton introduced me this evening, is a fine fellow; he has a grand head, a noble, earnest face, and there was something about his eyes that impressed me very strangely, as if I must have seen him before."

These remarks were made by Mr. Forest to his nephew, as, after their return from the opera and their meeting with the Houghton party, they were seated in their private parlor smoking their fragrant Havanas and talking over the events of the evening.

"He has a fine position; if that can make a fine fellow, I suppose he may be one," Arthur sneeringly replied.

"What is his position?" asked Mr. Forest.

"He is general manager of the telephone interests in this country."

"Indeed? That is a responsible position for a young chap like him. He must be wonderfully smart."

"He's smart enough to feather his own nest pretty well. I am told that he is getting rich fast," replied the young man, moodily.

"How old is he?"

"Twenty-three or four."

"Who is he? Where does he come from? Dunbar is a familiar name."

"He was brought up until he was twelve years old by a poor woman in Boston. About that time he came out to our place and worked for a farmer named Brown, sticking closely to his employment in the summer and going to school in the winter, for three or four years; after that he went back to the city as office boy for a lawyer, and I never saw him again until I met him here."

"He is an orphan then?"

"Yes—or at least he always passed himself off as one."

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"You do not seem to like him very well."

"I! He is nothing to me!" Arthur hastened to assert, somewhat scornfully. "But——"

"But what?"

"I have no faith in him; he was up to all sorts of things when we went to school together, and I believe these old tricks, particularly if they are mean ones, will cling to a boy all his life," Arthur responded; and, verily, we believe that he knew whereof he spoke.

"Oh, I don't know about that; all boys are full of mischief, and I reckon he was no worse than others," Mr. Forest remarked, charitably.

"Well, you can judge for yourself," returned his nephew, and then he proceeded to relate that story of the lost coin with which we are familiar, coloring it to suit himself, and making Louis out to have been a veritable little thief in his earlier days.

"He does not look like a chap of that character; I think his face a fine one—very."

Arthur made no reply, but his lips curled, showing his teeth in a disagreeable smile.

"I imagine also," pursued the gentleman, shooting another searching glance at his companion, "that your pretty little Miss Houghton thinks so, too."

Arthur scowled, hitched uneasily in his chair, impatiently threw away his cigar, and suppressed an oath.

Mr. Forest appeared not to heed his disquiet, and finally fell into a reverie that lasted a long time.

The following morning he informed Arthur that he was obliged to run down to Havre for a few days on business, but he must try to enjoy himself as well as he could during his absence. His traps, he said, he would leave to his care, although he supposed there was no danger of anything happening to them.

But that night found Arthur Aspinwall "enjoying himself" in a remarkably strange manner.

Every door leading into his uncle's room was locked, and the portières were closely drawn over them, every window was closed and the shades drawn down and the heavy draperies drooped over them, while the young man

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might have been seen sitting before a strong, iron-bound chest, trying numerous keys in its massive lock.

He was certainly "looking after" his uncle's traps in a most literal manner.

His efforts were at last rewarded; the bolt slipped in its socket, and the next moment he had lifted the lid of the chest—a mysterious article that had attracted and excited his curiosity the first time he had seen it, and its contents were at his mercy.

An examination of these revealed valuables of various kinds. There were trinkets and curiosities from different countries, boxes and bundles of papers relating to business transactions, account books, bank-books, notes, and bonds. There were packages of beautiful goods, silks, satins, embroideries, gloves, handkerchiefs, etc., evidently gifts intended for friends at home—perchance for Arthur's own mother, his uncle's sister, whom now he would never see in this life.

Every package and box, book and paper was thoroughly examined, and before morning broke Arthur had been through this wonderful treasure-chest, and could have told almost as much regarding his uncle's business and the amount of his possessions as Mr. Forest himself.

The clock on the mantel struck five, and he had examined everything save a narrow tray which was built into one side, or end, of the chest and securely locked.

He, however, finally succeeded in opening it with one of his smaller keys, and, lifting the cover, the first thing that caught his eyes was a large velvet case.

Opening it, he was dazzled by the glitter of a set of diamonds fit for a queen—necklace, tiara, ear-pendants, bracelets, and brooch.

"Where on earth did he get these and for whom were they intended?" he exclaimed, almost awed by their splendor and priceless value.

Another small case, or box, contained a variety of unset jewels, very valuable.

There remained now only a small mother-of-pearl case, fastened with a golden clasp.

Something made Arthur Aspinwall hesitate before opening this; he seemed to realize for the first time that

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he had been guilty of a mean and unworthy act in thus prying into the secrets of another.

But curiosity again prevailed over the small stock of honor that he possessed; he unfastened the golden clasp, turned back the velvet-lined lid, and found himself looking into the face of one of the loveliest women he had ever seen.

The picture was painted on porcelain, and the tints were exquisitely soft, the outline charming.

Lovely brown eyes, large liquid, and intense in their expression of love and confidence, gazed up at him with a look so strangely familiar that every nerve in his body began to thrill, as if from some electric shock, and his own face suddenly blanched with an undefinable fear.

The low, white forehead gleamed pure as a pearl through graceful waves of nut-brown hair, which were drawn back from the delicately veined temple, and coiled in a careless knot at the back of her pretty head.

The nose was small and slightly *retrousse;* the mouth one of wondrous sweetness, its scarlet curves perfect and beautiful beyond description; the round, white chin, like molded wax, curving away into the graceful neck.

The girl could not have been more than eighteen or twenty years of age when the picture was taken, and it certainly was as dainty a piece of portraiture as Arthur Aspinwall had ever looked upon.

"Who in heavens is—or was she?" he muttered, his fascinated eyes riveted upon the lovely face. "Can it be that Uncle Albert has been married, and this is a picture of his wife or daughter?" he questioned within himself.

"No, I do not believe it," he added, "or he would have referred to it in some way; and yet, I could almost take my oath that I have seen this same face before."

His own face was very pale, his brow settled into an ugly frown, and he gnawed his light mustache nervously.

In the other half of the case there was a velvet pad, with a loop of satin ribbon attached to it.

"This is evidently intended to come out," he said, and lifting it as he spoke, disclosed underneath two or three folded papers yellow and creased with age.

His ruthless fingers clutched them eagerly.

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The first one contained only a smooth, satiny ring of nut-brown hair, tied with a narrow blue ribbon.

The next a scrap of pale, silvery silk, like a piece cut from a web of goods.

The third was a folded paper that had something of the look of a legal document.

Arthur shivered slightly as he began to unfold this, though he could not have told why he did so.

He hesitated in the act, and glanced with some trepidation about him, as if he almost expected to find some one —perchance the spirit of this lovely woman upon whom he had just been gazing—coming forth from the shadows that lurked in the corners of the room, to denounce him for his meanness and treachery.

Then, with an impatient shrug of his shoulders, he resolutely unfolded the document and began to read it. As he did so, every atom of color died out of his face—even out of his lips. His eyes grew wild and large with fear and fierce with hate; his lips were set in a firm line of anger, and violent trembling ran over his whole frame.

For a long time he sat thus, staring at that paper, as if his mental powers failed to grasp the meaning of its contents.

*"Curse him!"* at length he cried, and the words came forth from his white lips with startling vehemence.

Then he hastily refolded the paper, though his hands shook in the act until it rattled in his grasp.

He carefully replaced it where he had found it, laid back the scrap of silk and that nut-brown curl, smoothed the velvet pad over all, and pressed it firmly down in its place.

He tried not to see that sweet face looking up at him from the opposite side of the case, but those lovely brown eyes seemed to follow his every movement as if they were instinct with life, and it was with a feeling of relief that he at last closed the case and returned it to the tray where he had found it.

He then replaced the jewel case exactly as he had found them, shut the cover of the till, relocking it; then, after sharply regarding the contents of the chest to see

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that everything was in its proper place, he closed the lid, locking that also, and then shoved his bunch of skeleton keys into the depths of one of his pockets while a look of relief swept over his face, as if he was glad that his dirty piece of work was done.

The clock on the mantel struck the half-hour after six as he arose and went to a window, put back the draperies, raised the shade, and let the morning light stream into the room where all night long he had been engaged in prying into the secrets of another.

A dark and troubled look rested on his face—a look that meant no good; it was fierce, cunning, resolute.

He stood there, lost in thought, for several minutes; then turning away from the calm beauty of the morning without, he sought his own chamber, where, throwing himself upon his bed, he soon fell into a profound slumber.

* * * * * * *

That same morning, as Louis Dunbar was on his way from his apartments to his office, he was suddenly startled by finding his pathway blocked by the figure of a man.

Looking up, he found himself face to face with Louis Murray—the man who, three or four years before, had claimed him as his son.

"You here in Paris!" the young man exclaimed, while his heart sank within him.

"Yes, I am here in Paris. You didn't mean that your fond father should know whither his son had departed, did you?" was the mocking response.

"I took no pains to conceal my actions from any one," Louis answered.

"Ah, yes; I should have remembered that my son is always open and aboveboard in all his dealings," Mr. Murray retorted, sarcastically adding: "But you perceive that my affection for you was so strong that I was forced to follow you even across the ocean."

"Do I understand that was your object in coming to Paris—to follow me?"

"Exactly."

"Well, what else?"

"Ahem! I knew you had obtained a very lucrative

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position; being hard up myself, I naturally supposed you'd be willing to assist your poor father out of his difficulties."

"You are a well, strong man—why do you not obtain employment and take care of yourself?" Louis demanded.

"Because work and I never did agree."

"Do you mean to imply that you followed me here with the expectation that I would support you in idleness?"

"That is putting it in a very disagreeable way, Louis, but really I did expect that my only son would be willing to share his good luck with his father."

"I am obliged to tell you, then, that you will be sadly disappointed. I will find you something to do, if you like; but as for having you fasten yourself upon me and then lead the kind of life that you led in Boston, I tell you at the outset that I will not have it."

The man scowled darkly.

"You're a very affectionate son, now, aren't you?"

"No, sir, I do not think I am," Louis frankly admitted. "I am free to confess that I entertain very little of either affection or respect for you. Still I am not heartless; if the same blood flows in our veins, I would not be unmindful of the fact, nor undutiful, if you were suffering and needed my aid. And I say now that I will get work for you if you will do it."

"I won't, curse you! I want money!" retorted the man, fiercely.

"Haven't you any?"

"Five francs."

Louis thought a moment.

"I will pay your passage back to America and give you a hundred dollars. Will you go?" he proposed at last.

"*No!*" was the angry answer, accompanied with a fearful oath.

"Very well; then you will please look after your own interests," Louis very coolly replied; and, stepping aside, passed on his way without looking to the right or left, while the baffled man behind him sent a torrent of abuse and invective after him, vowing he would make him eat

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humble pie for his impudence before he was six months older.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### A PORTRAIT WITH A HISTORY.

Mr. Forest's business detained him at Havre for several days, during which time Arthur occupied his time much as usual in seeking his own pleasure. But he did not appear to be in as good spirits as usual; something seemed to worry and depress him, although he strove to conceal it from his friends, and at times assumed a gayety which, even to them, seemed forced and unnatural.

One day, shortly after the return of Mr. Forest, Mrs. Houghton arranged for a trip to Versailles. Mr. Forest and Arthur were invited to join the party, also Louis and some young friends of Mrs. Parker, and Ada, and the merry company started forth one bright morning, all eager to visit that wonderful palace, around which there clusters so much of thrililng romance and tragedy.

The day was perfect, and the ten-mile drive over the lovely roads was one never to be forgotten. They reached the royal palace about noon, having stopped on the way thither to view the ruins of Saint Cloud, once the magnificent and favorite residence of Napoleon Third; and her they roamed at pleasure through its marble halls, its vast apartments, and galleries which contained such rare collections of paintings, statuary, and curiosities of every description.

Thence to *Le Grand Trianon,* where Napoleon resided with Josephine, and where he conceived the infamous plan of sacrificing that lovely woman to his inordinate ambition.

From there they went to *Le Petit Trianon,* the charming residence of the ill-fated Queen Marie Antoinette, then to the royal stables, where, in empty and silent state, stand the elegant though ponderous vehicles once used for the pleasure of the imperial household.

Then came a stroll through the beautiful park, adorned with magnificent statuary, sparkling with fountains, its

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walks winding through romantic grottoes, beneath the shadows of moss-grown rocks and along the margins of rippling streams, or the shores of quiet and beautiful lakes, and through groves of orange, and myrtle, and pine.

To our young lovers, Louis and Margaret, this was a day of unalloyed delight; but to Margaret the beauties of the park were less interesting than the curiosities within the palace, and finally telling Mrs. Houghton that they were going back to the picture-gallery in *Le Petit Trianon,* they slipped away unobserved by the rest of the party, found a guide to whom they made known their desire, and were soon deep in the study of those rare and beautiful pictures that adorn the walls of that lovely villa.

During a tour of the main gallery they came upon a picture evidently the portrait of a remarkably lovely woman, which they had not noticed before.

She was young, scarcely twenty, one would judge, and a vision that once seen could never be forgotten.

A beautifully shaped head was set somewhat proudly upon a pair of graceful shoulders; a wealth of rich brown hair was gathered back from a pure white forehead, save a few delicate rings which lay lightly upon it; the eyes were large, dark, and liquid, and seemed to hold one with an expression which was difficult to fathom. The nose was small, the nostrils peculiarly delicate; the smiling mouth was arch, yet wonderfully sweet and tender, the whole face a pure and perfect oval, the chief charm of which, however, lay in the fascinating eyes.

"Where have I seen such eyes before?" murmured Louis meditatively. "There is a glory, and beauty, and tenderness in them that thrill me strangely."

Margaret glanced up at him as he said this:

He had bared his head, and stood gazing at the wonderful picture with wistful earnestness.

Margaret Houghton's own beautiful face paled a trifle. She started—glanced from him to the picture, from the picture back to her lover again.

"Where?" She breathed in a low, startled tone. "Louis, go to the glass over yonder and look into your

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own eyes; mark the shape of your head, your brows, the contour of your whole face. You will find the counterpart of this picture in the reflection of your own countenance, only, of course, it is not quite so effeminate."

"Margaret, what are you saying? Surely you cannot mean anything so absurd!" the young man exclaimed.

"Go look," she repeated, giving him a gentle push toward a lofty pier-glass on the opposite side of the room.

He went half smiling, yet with a strange sensation at his heart.

There had been something in the portrait that he had recognized, and now he had a vague idea that it was something like him.

But as he stood before the glass and looked at his reflection his face became grave, his heart grew quick and heavy in its pulsations.

But those glorious eyes opposite—he could see them in the glass behind him, and now they seemed to meet and hold his almost without a look of recognition—might have been painted for his own. That brow, though a trifle more delicate and refined, was the exact outline of his own, and the head, though not so massive and strongly developed, was the very counterpart of that reflected in the glass.

"It is wonderful!" he said, going back to the side of his betrothed.

"You see the resemblance, then?" the fair girl said.

"Of course—I cannot help it."

"I wonder who she was? Perhaps," Margaret added, more lightly and smiling, "you will yet find that you belong to the nobility of *la belle France*."

"Nonsense, dear; it is only one of those circumstances which people term a 'remarkable coincidence,'" he answered skeptically.

"I do not believe it," Margaret returned positively, while her eyes rested studiously upon the fair face looking down upon them from the canvas. "I am impressed, Louis, that you are in some way connected with this beautiful woman."

The door opened while she was speaking, and her

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mother, followed by several of their party, entered the room.

"Do come here, mamma, Mr. Forest," she continued, eagerly turning toward them, "and tell me if you do not think Mr. Dunbar's resemblance to this picture something wonderful. Look," she went on excitedly, "at those eyes —the shape, color, and expression are identical! see the peculiar curve of the brows—the shape of the head."

"Really, Mr. Dunbar, it is strangely like you," Mrs. Houghton observed with surprise.

"Ah! Mr. Forest, you observe it also," Margaret said, as that gentleman came forward, looked up at the picture, gave a violent start, and then turned eagerly toward Louis.

"It is wonderful!" he said, after gazing into the young man's eyes for a moment; but they all noticed that he spoke in a strained, unatural voice and wondered that he should turn so abruptly away afterward.

Others of the party gathered around and commented upon the resemblance, and so no one saw, for the moment, Arthur Aspinwall, who had entered the room last, nor the frightened start which he had given upon seeing the picture and hearing the conversation regarding it.

No one had seen him grow deadly pale and suddenly clutch at his neck-tie as if it were choking him; nor the fierce light that had leaped into his eyes as they fell upon Louis; neither had they heard the low-breathed imprecation that had escaped him as, glancing from the portrait to the young man, he seemed to find in the strange likeness between the two, a deadlier cause than ever for hatred toward his old-time enemy.

But he quickly recovered himself and came forward to join the circle.

"Humph," he ejaculated, skeptically. "It is simply what one would call a 'freak of nature.' That woman, one can see at a glance, was French, through and through, while any one cannot doubt that Dunbar is of Scotch descent, as his name indicates."

Margaret Houghton's cheek reddened at his sneering tone.

"I own," she said, turning to him with cold dignity,

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"that Mr. Dunbar has the splendid physique of the Scotch race, but that does not prove that some of his ancestors may not have been of French descent. However that may have been, I never saw a more vivid resemblance between two faces."

Mr. Forest, who had been busily engaged in turning the leaves of his guide-book, now came forward again.

"I have been looking for the name of the picture," he said; "it is simply catalogued as the 'Portrait of a Lady-in-waiting to Marie Antoinette.'"

"That is very unsatisfactory," said Margaret, looking disappointed. "I am exceedingly curious to know her name. Ah, there is the gentleman who explained some of the curiosities in the library to me," she added, as an elderly gentleman entered the room. "I am going to ask him about it."

She approached him in her sweet, gracious way, and asked him if he could tell them anything about the picture that had interested them so much.

"What is the number?" he asked.

"Number 22, and the guide-book merely says it is the 'Portrait of a Lady-in-Waiting to Marie Antoinette.' We are particularly interested in it," Margaret added, "because one of our party resembles the picture so strikingly—that gentleman standing near it with his hat off."

The beautiful girl's face flushed a lovely color as she thus called attention to her lover, who stood there looking so grand, and manly, and handsome.

"*Oui, oui!*" responded the Frenchman, his eyes now riveted with astonishment upon the young man. "*Oui, oui!*" he repeated; "I tell mademoiselle presently," and turning abruptly, he trotted into a corner of the room, where there stood an ancient-looking desk of solid ebony richly inlaid with gold.

Drawing a key from his pocket, he unlocked a compartment of it, and took thence a book. Opening it at a certain page, he found a paragraph headed "No. 22," and handing the book to Margaret with a polite bow, he remarked that it was a descriptive catalogue, and the paragraph would doubtless give her the information she desired.

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With her beautiful eyes gleaming and her face all aglow, Margaret took the precious book and went back to her friends, and read aloud the following:

"Number 22. Portrait of Mlle. Louise de Brienze, Lady-in-waiting to Marie Antoinette in 1790-3. Youngest daughter of M. Lomenie de Brienze. She was the special favorite of the queen, and the acknowledged beauty of the court. At the outbreak of the revolution she alone of all her family escaped and fled to Scotland. Marie Antoinette was deeply attached to her and very proud of her beauty, giving an order in 1791 for her portrait to be painted by the court painter."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Miss Houghton, lifting her wistful eyes and speaking in a tone of regret, as she finished reading the above; "I wish I could learn more about her—I want to know what became of her after she escaped to Scotland."

"I am afraid, Margie, you are weaving a very disappointing romance in that fertile brain of yours," Mrs. Houghton remarked, smiling, as she saw her daughter's eyes rove again to the picture and then to her lover's face.

"Perhaps I am, mamma," Margaret responded, thoughtfully; "but somehow I am impressed that this woman is in some way connected with Louis."

Arthur Aspinwall, standing near, heard this reply, although it was intended only for Mrs. Houghton's ears, and he started as she uttered Louis' name so familiarly.

Surely matters must have progressed more rapidly than he had any idea of, if she had already learned to call him by his Christian name. It did not promise well for his suit.

His face grew dark with sullen anger, as he glanced from one to the other with jealous eyes. If he could not win her for himself, he could not endure the thought that the man he hated should succeed where he had failed.

"Is there no other record that will tell us anything more of this lady?" Margaret asked, turning again to the gentleman who had found the book for her.

"Mademoiselle, is interested very much," he said, smiling into her bright, eager face.

"Yes, yes; I would so like to know if she married, or

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what became of her after she went to Scotland," she returned.

"Did mademoiselle notice any figures besides certain words in the record."

"No;" and she turned eagerly back to the passage that she had read.

"Ah! yes; here is the figure 1 after the word Scotland," Miss Houghton replied, her face brightening.

"It refers to a note at the back of the book," the man informed her, and taking the volume from her hand, he turned the pages hurriedly, found what he was searching for, and passed it back to her again.

With her face kindling into strange beauty, she read:

"'Mlle. Louise de Brienze, after flying from France, being the only surviving member of her family, fell to the care of some distant relatives in Edinburgh, with whom she remained until her marriage with'—oh, mamma! Louis!—'the great grandson of the poet William Dunbar—one Wallace Dunbar, a gentleman of literary pursuits and great learning.'"

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### MR. FOREST IS INTERESTED.

"I knew it! I knew it!" cried the young girl, as she concluded reading the note regarding Mlle. de Brienze and her marriage, and there was a ring of triumph in her sweet tones as she turned toward her lover.

Louis had turned a trifle pale, but he smiled skeptically as he held out his hand for the book from which she had just been reading.

She gave it to him, and he quietly perused the note. Then he said, bending near to her, and speaking in a hollow tone:

"You forget, dear, that my surname is not Dunbar."

"True," she said, her countenance clouding a trifle. "But," she added, after a moment of thought, "the name, you know, belonged to her mother; it must have come down to her from some ancestor, and I cannot help believing still that you are in some way connected with this court beauty. It *must* be; your strange resemblance to

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her is no freak of nature; I feel *sure* there is a good reason for it, if we could only trace it."

"It is barely possible that I may be distantly related to these people of whom we have read, but I cannot see how I am to reap any advantage from it, even if it could be proved. It would be very pleasant, however," he concluded, with a touch of bitterness, "to know that I was honorably connected. It must be pleasant to know that one has had noble ancestors."

"Hush, Louis," Margaret said, gently; "you are noble yourself, and that is more honorable than to have had illustrious progenitors."

Louis gave her a quick, fond smile; then turning to the others of the party, he said, lightly:

"We have been pleasantly entertained for a half-hour by this little incident, but I do not attach any importance to any resemblance I may have to Mlle. de Brienze. I think we shall have to return this interesting book to its place, and leave the secrets of the past alone. What I know of my parentage goes to prove, I believe, that I could reap no benefit to trace my ancestry back three or four generations."

"Ha, Dunbar! then you have learned something more concerning your parentage since you and I were boys at school?" said Arthur Aspinwall, approaching him, and speaking with strange eagerness.

"Yes," Louis answered, briefly, and not caring to be questioned further, he shut the book he had and handed it back to their attendant, thanking him for his courtesy; then he led the way from the room, anxious to be relieved from the conspicuous position that he had been occupying during the last half-hour.

Mr. Forest lingered before that portrait after the rest of the party had passed out, studying it with strange intentness. Suddenly he turned to the attendant, saying:

"Pardon, monsieur, but will you kindly allow me to read for myself what is printed regarding this picture?"

"*Oui, monsieur,*" the man replied, politely, and handing him the book.

Mr. Forest took and re-read the account, after which he copied it carefully into his own note-book.

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"Rather a startling resemblance that of the young man to the picture?" he remarked, carelessly, to his companion.

"*Oui, monsieur,* exceedingly."

"He does not appear to pay much attention to it, however?"

"To me it is very strange, monsieur," replied the man, adding with an expressive shrug of his shoulders: "But Americans care not much for pedigree."

Mr. Forest smiled, amusedly, and then, having finished his copying, he returned the book, thanking the man for his kindness, and dropping a five-franc piece into his hand as a substantial token of his gratitude.

Then he hastened to rejoin his friends, whom he found already in the carriage waiting for him, and wondering at his absence.

The party, on their return to Paris, were driven directly to Mrs. Houghton's hospitable home, where a sumptuous dinner awaited them, and the evening was spent in a most social manner.

As Margaret passed to her seat at the table, which happened to be opposite that of Arthur, the young man caught the flash of a brilliant diamond on the third finger of her left hand. A second glance told him that it was a new one.

"They are engaged," he said to himself, with a terrible heart-sinking, while for a moment his head reeled, as he felt that his cause was lost, and with it a quarter of a million of money.

But he recovered himself immediately, though the look of bitter hatred that he bent upon Louis indicated that he would have annihilated him, if such a thing had been possible. The lovers, however, seated side by side, and wrapped up in their own happiness, were wholly unconscious of both his disappointment and his enmity.

"Do you enjoy life here in Paris, Mr. Dunbar?" Mr. Forest asked of Louis a little later in the evening, when, having watched his opportunity, he succeeded in opening a little private chat with him.

"Very much," Louis replied, smiling, and all uncon-

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scious of the fond look in his eyes as they rested upon his lovely *fiancée* across the room.

Mr. Forest's own eyes twinkled, for he had seen it, and read plainly enough the story of their love, and while he could not help regretting the disapointment which this state of affairs would entail upon his nephew, he could not fail to acknowledge that Louis Dunbar was the nobler man of the two, and better calculated to make the fair girl's life a happy one.

"Do you think you like Paris well enough to make it a permanent home?" he continued.

"No, sir; I hardly think I do," Louis answered, gravely. "I believe I am too thoroughly American to be willing to become a permanent resident in any other country. I should not choose France if I were, for the life of the French people, as a class, is too superficial and pleasure-seeking to be the noblest kind of a life."

"Then, even if you should discover by and by that your ancestors were French, you think you could not be weaned from America?" Mr. Forest asked.

"No, sir, I shall not trouble myself very much about that matter. I was born in America, and I do not believe that any other country would ever seem like home to me. I am afraid I should not be content here even now," Louis added, smiling and flushing slightly, "if it were not for the very pleasant friends whom I have met here, and the lucrative position that I hold."

"Ah, then you are making money, young man?"

"Yes, sir; I find my business very profitable."

"I do not know about its being a good thing for one as young as you are to make money too fast," observed Mr. Forest, gravely.

Louis looked up questioningly.

"I think it hardens a man's nature, makes him grasping and avaricious if he learns to love gold too well, and makes the attainment of it his one purpose in life," explained the gentleman.

"I think so, too," Louis returned; and I am afraid I was once in great danger of drifting that way. I saw so much misery and shiftlessness when I was a boy that the only thing worth living for, it seemed to me, was to get rich. But I believe I have learned since that there

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are better things to be obtained in life than an independent fortune."

"What things?" asked his companion, bestowing a searching glance upon the young man's earnest face.

"A good education for one thing, a good name, an unimpeachable character, and the charity that makes all mankind one's brother."

"Have you attained all that?" queried Mr. Forest, with a touch of sarcasm in his tone.

"Oh, no, sir," Louis said, flushing. "I should be egregiously egotistical to assume that. I simply assert that I have learned to feel that the qualities I have enumerated are more to be desired than mere wealth."

"What use would you put a fortune to if you should succeed in amassing one? Do you simply want to have it said that you are a rich man, or that you may be able to live at your ease and gratify your tastes?"

"I am bound to confess that I have some selfish motive in desiring wealth," Louis returned, his tender glance again unconsciously resting upon his betrothed; but at the same time I have a desire—and it has grown with me from boyhood—to be able to make others happy. There were years when I knew nothing about my parentage—when I was ragged, neglected, hungry, and unhappy, and unable to understand why things were so unequally divided in this world. Some one was very good to me just then, out of her abundance proving to me that there were kind people even among the rich. I was very grateful, and it was the turning point of my life. I vowed, if I lived, that *I would* be a rich man, and that *I* would devote a portion of my wealth to making others as happy as I was that day over that simple act of kindness. But, pardon me," Louis concluded, in some confusion, "I am talking too much about myself."

Mr. Forest reached out and grasped the young man's hand.

"I honor you, my young friend, for the sentiments you have expressed, and I thank you for having allowed me this glimpse of your inner nature," he said, earnestly; then he added: "But you say 'there *was* a time when you knew nothing about your parentage'—my nephew has told me there was a mystery regarding your birth; that

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seems to imply that you have since had your doubts removed."

Louis' face fell.

He could never refer to his father without a sense of shame and humiliation, though he often reproached himself for it; but he was so noble and upright in his own nature that it cut him keenly to know that the man whom he ought to love and respect most was utterly unworthy of his filial regard.

"Yes, sir," he replied, gravely; "I discovered the mystery of my birth some four or five years ago."

Mr. Forest regarded him keenly for a moment.

"Would you mind telling me about it?" he asked, hesitatingly. "Pardon me if I seem inquisitive," he added, flushing as he saw that his request had embarrassed his companion; "but really, Mr. Dunbar, I feel a deep interest in you; in fact, any young man who has struggled up through poverty and hardship, and made a position for himself, becomes to me an object worthy the greatest respect and esteem."

His look was so kind, his tone so earnest and inviting, that Louis somehow felt as if he were an old friend, and almost involuntarily he unburdened his whole heart to him, and related all that he knew of his own history.

Mr. Forest appeared deeply interested in the account, and, when Louis had concluded, asked a number of searching questions regarding the man Murray's claim and proofs.

"You do not adopt his name?" he said, inquiringly.

"No, sir," Louis returned, coloring a deep crimson; "I could not; when I learned what his life and business were, I preferred to retain the name by which I had always been known; besides——"

"Well, do not be afraid of me, Mr. Dunbar," said Mr. Forest, smiling as his companion stopped short.

"I have never confessed as much to any one before," Louis continued, deprecatingly; "but truly I have never felt the least affection for the man—he has, on the contrary, repelled me; and even before I discovered his illegal and disreputable transactions, I found it difficult to feel any sympathy with him, or bestow upon him the proper regard of a son."

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Mr. Forest made no reply to this, but looked so grave, almost stern, that Louis felt sure he disapproved of the confession he had just made, and he regretted that he had given uterance to the words.

"You do not appear to attach much importance to your resemblance to the portrait which we saw to-day," Mr. Forest at length observed.

"No, sir. I own that the likeness was rather startling, but if I am indeed connected in any way with the original, the relationship is doubtless so distant that I could reap no benefit from it," Louis answered indifferently.

"It is singular that this court beauty should have married a Dunbar—that your mother should have borne that name, and that you should resemble the picture so strikingly, if there is not some of the Brienze blood in your veins."

"Yes, it is strange. My mother's name was Annie Dunbar Burgess—so Mr. Murray informed me, and he said nothing to lead me to suppose she was not of American parentage. She may have been remotely connected with the Scotch Dunbars, but I do not believe it would be worth my while to seek to trace back her ancestors."

"Annie Dunbar!" repeated Mr. Forest, in an absent tone. When he asked: "Have you nothing belonging to her by which you could discover how she was related to the Dunbars?"

"I have nothing but her wedding-ring, and a little volume of Tennyson's poems—given her, my father asserted, by her cousin Alfred Burgess; a little verse on the fly-leaf, in his handwriting, is signed 'A.'"

"Do you know the date of your mother's marriage?" Mr. Forest inquired, seeming not to have heard Louis' last remark.

"Yes; it is engraven upon this ring, which I have worn ever since it would fit my finger," the young man returned, removing the heavy gold band from the little finger of his left hand and passing it to his companion.

He bent low to examine the date engraven upon its inner surface.

"Uncle Albert are you aware that it is nearly midnight?"

Mr. Forest started so violently at the sound of his

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nephew's voice, that he dropped the ring he was examining, and it went rolling over the carpet almost to Margaret Houghton's feet.

Arthur Aspinwall had been chatting with his aunt and cousin on the opposite side of the room, but he had been keenly watching his uncle and Louis, and was anything but pleased with the evidence of good will and sympathy established between the two, and he resolved to break up their interesting *tête-à-tête* without delay.

He had come up behind them silently just as his uncle bent to examine Louis' ring.

There was a dark look upon his face, and he shot a glance of hate and disdain upon his foe as he spoke to Mr. Forest.

"Bless me, is it possible!" exclaimed that gentleman, in reply to his question, and looking more startled, his nephew thought, than the occasion required. "I had no idea that it was so late," he added, recovering his composure. "I was so interested in what Mr. Dunbar was telling me I did not mind how rapidly the time was passing. Pardon my awkwardness in dropping your ring," he added to Louis, who had recovered it. "I'm afraid I have bored you with my questions."

"Not at all," Louis answered, heartily. "I feared it was *vice versa* with my reminiscences."

"No, indeed, I—well, I am coming to see you one of these days at your office; I want to know more about your business. Perhaps I may want to invest in some of your stock," Mr. Forest returned, as he cordially shook hands with him, and then turned to take leave of the ladies.

"Not if I can help it," muttered Arthur Aspinwall to himself. "You're getting altogether too thick with this beggar to suit me—I'd like to sink him in the Seine and have done with him forever; he's been nothing but a marplot ever since he first crossed my path."

Louis lingered only a few minutes after their departure, just long enough for a few words with his betrothed, then he too departed.

As he stepped out on the street a hand was laid rudely upon his arm.

"Louis, I want some money," was the authoritative

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demand by which he was saluted, and his father confronted him with a determined attitude.

"I told you I should not give you money," Louis said, in reply, and shaking his arm free.

"But I spent my last sou for a roll, at tea-time. Will you let your own father go hungry while you feast upon the fat of the land?" was the whining query.

The hot blood mounted to the young man's brow. He plunged his hand into his pocket, drew forth a five-franc piece, and dropped it upon the man's palm.

"That will keep you from hunger until morning, then, if you'll come to me I will get you work; but I will not give you money to gamble away, or to support you in idleness while you are in health. I mean what I saw, and it will be useless for you to apply to me."

Louis spoke in a stern, resolute tone, and, without waiting for any reply, he quickened his steps, leaving the applicant for alms standing crest-fallen and angry over the small amount that he had received.

Presently he pocketed his money, then looked back and watched Louis' retreating figure until it turned a corner and disappeared from sight.

"You young whelp!" he said, shaking his fist in that direction, "you don't bleed worth a cent; but—I'll find a way to make you shell out—I'll skin you yet, or my name isn't—ha! ha! Louis Murray."

A half-hour later he might have been found in a low gambling-house, where, strange to say, he played a winning game with the five-franc piece Louis had given him, and when at length he left the place he had several times the amount in his pocket.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE INFLUENCE OF SYMPATHY.

During the next few days Mr. Forest seemed troubled and depressed, and was so absent-minded and irritable that Arthur's small stock of patience gave out entirely, and, taking himself off to some fashionable club-rooms, he left his uncle to come to himself as best he could.

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When he returned Mr. Forest was gone, and on one was able to tell him whither. He found a note, however, upon his dressing-case, saying that he should be away on business for several weeks; that he inclosed a check for two thousand francs, which he hoped would do for incidentals until his return.

Arthur pocketed the generous check and heaved a sigh of relief.

It was becoming irksome to him to play propriety and the dutiful nephew before his uncle, and so he did not feel at all disturbed to be left to his own devices, with plenty of money in his pocket, and no one to criticise his movements or interfere with his pleasures.

Nevertheless the young man did not appear to be in a happy frame of mind, for, after a day or two, he too became moody and depressed, pale, restless, and nervous; and, instead of being about to enjoy himself as he had at first planned, upon being relieved of the presence of his uncle, he remained shut up in his rooms most of the time for several days.

He could not remain long away from the Houghtons, however, even though he was quite sure, since seeing that new diamond on her hand, that Margaret had pledged herself to his hated rival; and so some portion of every day was sure to find him in her society, either at home or following in her wake to some place of amusement.

The fair girl could not fail to notice the change in his appearance, and attributed it to her rejection of his suit. This of course engendered a feeling of pity in her heart, and softened her manner and bearing toward him somewhat.

"I am afraid that Paris doesn't agree with you, Arthur," she remarked to him one evening, when, dropping in upon them, she noticed he was more haggered and depressed than usual.

"I am sure it does not of late," he replied, moodily.

"Then why——" she began, and suddenly stopped.

"Why do I not go home? you were going to ask," he supplemented with a bitterness of tone that made her very uncomfortable.

"Well, it would have been a very natural question," she said, trying to speak lightly.

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"Of course, and I will tell you why," he returned, fiercely. "I do not go home simply because I should be more miserable than here; because I am bound, chained to Paris by an influence I cannot sever. While you remain here, Margie, I must remain also—even if I knew I should die by staying. I could not go. Have you no pity for me?"

"You should not talk like this to me," Margaret replied, with dignity, yet with a ring of sadness in her tone," while almost unconsciously she nervelessly turned round and round upon her finger the diamond Louis had given her.

"I suppose I should not now," he retorted, with angry emphasis, his eyes fixed with a blazing look of hate upon the ring; "but at least there is no need of your flaunting your engagement in my face."

She started.

"I—— What do you mean?" she demanded, haughtily, her face flushing crimson.

He cast his eyes with a meaning glance upon her nervous hands, while a bitter smile curled his lips.

"Ah!" she said, letting them drop apart, as she comprehended his meaning, "I did not know what I was doing. That is a habit I always had."

"Then the ring is a pledge?" he questioned, his frame quivering with suppressed passion.

"Yes, it is a pledge," she answered, quietly, thinking it better for him to know the truth at once.

"You own it, then—you dare own it to me that you are engaged to Louis Dunbar?"

"Why should I not dare to own it to you?" she said, coldly, "I am proud to acknowledge that I am Mr. Dunbar's betrothed wife."

"Margaret Houghton, beware!" Arthur Aspinwall hissed, white to his very lips. "That low-born churl, that ignoble upstart, who cannot name his father, will bring grief upon you yet, mark my words; you'll find that beneath his prepossessing exterior there is a nature capable of depths of evil such as you have never dreamed of, and if you marry him I swear you shall live to curse your wedding-day!"

"Arthur Aspinwall," she said, with calm dignity, "you

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have no right to use such language in my presence, and a repetition of such unmanly conduct will be promptly followed by the request to discontinue your visits here."

She turned abruptly from him as she ceased speaking and walked proudly from the room.

She did not hear him go out, but when, fifteen minutes later, she was informed that Mr. Dunbar was below, and went down to meet him, Louis sat there alone and in the very chair that Arthur had occupied.

He arose to meet her and folded her close in his arms.

"My darling," he said, tenderly, "it seems as if I have you but very little to myself. I am so busy during the day, and there are so many claimants for your society when evening comes. I am fortunate for once, however."

"We have a great many demands upon our time, and, to tell the truth, Louis, I am becoming very weary of it," Margaret answered, gravely.

"Then, I wonder if you would consider me very selfish or presuming to ask you to name an early day for our marriage, so that I may claim you all my own?"

"Oh, Louis, I have been so happy in the present that I have not planned for that at all as yet," Margaret said, looking a trifle startled by his proposition, but with a brilliant color suffusing her face.

"I learned to-day," pursued Louis, "that Mr. Houghton is contemplating a return to America before many months."

"Yes; papa will be ready to go home in the spring."

"My lily wife, will *you* be ready to go home in the spring?"

Margaret Houghton lifted her pure face to her lover, a beautiful tenderness upon it.

"How can I go without you?" she murmured.

"Can you *stay,* and let them—your father and mother—go without *you?*"

Tears sprang suddenly to the blue eyes upraised to his, for "father and mother" were very, very dear to the young girl.

Then a vivid flush dyed all her face, while a tremulous smile of love and trust wreathed her lips, and Louis Dunbar knew that she would stay with him and be con-

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tent—that she would leave all else and cleave only to him.

"You will stay as my wife, love?" he breathed, and she answered:

"I will stay."

"Bless you, my darling! then I shall speak to Mr. Houghton at once. I believe I am the happiest man in all France to-night."

Margaret never forgot him as he looked at that moment.

They had seated themselves upon a small velvet *tête-à-tête* which spanned a corner of the room between a very wide arch leading into the next apartment and a window. There were heavy, elegant draperies suspended from both arch and window, and these were looped back with heavy cords and tassels, forming a mass of brilliant and artistic folds in the corner behind them, making a lovely background for the happy couple seated there.

Margaret thought she had never looked upon anything more attractive than Louis' grand head and handsome, glowing face, outlined as they were against the rich scarlet and gold of those draperies; and yet she never recalled that picture afterward without a shudder and a sickening sensation at her heart.

They sat there for more than an hour, talking over their plans and arranging for the beautiful life which they believed was before them.

"There is one thing, dearest, about which I must talk with you," Louis said, very gravely, a little while before he left.

"Well, dear, is it anything very dreadful?" Margaret said, archly.

"No; but, Margie, I cannot help knowing that some people will accuse me of being a fortune-hunter; for every one who knows you knows also that you possess a large sum of money in your own right."

"Yes; a wealthy relative left me quite a handsome legacy; but really, dear, I do not consider that a *mis*-fortune," said the young girl, with a light laugh.

"No, darling; but I am going to prove to the world that I had no thought of that when I won you. I am

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going to have it so arranged that you alone can have the disposal of it."

"Oh, Louis, I am afraid that you are very proud," Margaret interrupted, reproachfully. "I not only gladly give myself, but all that I have, to you."

"And I only want yourself," Louis replied, fondly. "Yes, I *am* proud, my darling," he added—"too proud to be willing to have it said that I, a comparatively poor man, married my wife for her money. And now that that is off my mind, tell me, dear, how you would like to live."

"Let us live like real American people," Margaret replied, eagerly. "This French life may be very well for people brought up to it, but I so long for a cozy, sensible home. Let us take a house, not a large one, either, furnish it in true Yankee style—by that, I mean, let us be practical and comfortable; we will not keep more than one or two servants; we will have our three regular meals a day, live for ourselves instead of the world. I have had so much excitement during the last year that I shall be glad to live quietly for a while."

"You could not have planned anything that would have suited me better," Louis said, his face radiant over this chaming home picture.

"Louis," Margaret said, with a sweet seriousness that made her very lovely, "I am so happy to-night that I feel strangely. I do not feel worthy of so much joy. It seems as if I always lived a very selfish life, always receiving and absorbing, and never giving anything in return. If I could only pour out a little of my happiness into the life of some one else—do something to show how grateful I am for the beautiful future that seems to be opening for me."

Louis Dunbar was deeply moved by her words. He gathered her two small white hands in his, and pressed them close against his breast; he bent forward and touched her pure forehead with reverent lips.

"Look into my eyes, my darling, read my whole soul if you can," he said, in low, intense tones; "let it tell you where I received my first inspiration to become something better and nobler than the poor, ignorant waif who wandered aimlessly about the streets of Boston, and who

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bade fair to grow up like the other vagabonds about him; ask how I first came to say to myself, 'I mean to be a good man; *I will* be a good man'; see there what pure image I have treasured to help me onward and upward, and never say again that you have led a 'selfish life—always receiving and absorbing, and never giving anything in return.' My darling, it was your kind words, your generous sympathy, your charity and pity for me that touched a chord in my heart that had never vibrated before, and it is to your sweet and gentle influence I owe my present prosperity and whatever of good and truth there may be in me."

"Louis, you attach altogether too much importance to those simple acts of long ago," Margaret began, while tears sprang into her eyes and flashed upon her golden lashes.

"No, dear, I do not," he answered, decidedly, and interrupting her. "I tell you they were seed dropped just at the right time; they were the little words spoken in season; without them there is no knowing what I might have become. I did not realize until then what possibilities there were in life. I never should have realized them if that sweet, blue-eyed little girl had turned away coldly from me that day, taunting me with my poverty, as others did, instead of stamping her image indelibly upon my heart by her pitiful looks and kindness, and thus giving me an object in life—that of becoming worthy to be your friend in the future if we both should live."

The beautiful girl lifted her face and softly touched her lips to his.

"How glad I am that I was kind!" she said. "I might have been thoughtlessly indifferent, or even cruel; but, dear, without a good soil the 'seed' could not have taken root and borne such abundant fruit; without a tender conscience the 'little word spoken in season' could not have been so effective; there was a natural ability within you, Louis; nothing that I could do could have given you that. Truth and honor beamed in the eyes of beautiful Louise de Brienze as she looked down upon us from the canvas the other day; truth and honor are your heritage from her, my noble descendant of a sweet and royal

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lady; I feel more and more sure of it the more I think about it," Margaret concluded, earnestly.

Louis smiled fondly into her upturned face.

"If it pleases you to weave a pretty little romance regarding my ancestry, I will not destroy it, though I fear it will prove to be only a vision of your imagination," he said, lightly; then added, more gravely: "But, dear, I do not feel that it would be right to claim kinship with any honorable people while I am dishonored by my own father."

"What do you mean, Louis?" Margaret asked, startled by the look of pain that swept over his face.

"My father has followed me here."

"To Paris?"

"Yes. Perhaps I should have told you before; but I shrank from doing so."

"Does he annoy you?"

"He keeps demanding money of me, and refuses to do any honorable work. I fear he is following his evil practices here, and I cannot feel otherwise than degraded by it," Louis said, with a sigh.

"I am sorry, on your account, Louis," Margaret returned, gently. "Cannot you persuade him to go away."

"I have tried, but he refuses. He evidently intends to avail himself of my present prosperous circumstances, and live in idleness. He will find, however, that he has made a great mistake. He is a strong, well man, and I should do both him and myself a wrong to give him money freely and allow him to lead the life here that he used to in Boston. But," Louis added, rising, "I must not linger longer here."

"It is not late yet," Margaret pleaded, as she too arose, while she clasped her white hands around his arm as if very loth to let him go.

"I know it is not, Margie; but," dropping his voice, "there is a large sum of money in my office—I did not receive it in time to deposit it in the bank; and I feel as if I must go and take a look about the premises, to see that all is safe, before I go to my rooms."

Margaret did not urge him further, but accompanied him to the hall, still clinging to his arm.

"I wonder if life will be always as beautiful, and if we

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shall always love each other as we do now?" she said, as he bent to receive his good-night caress.

"Whose heart do you doubt—your own or mine?" he questioned, smiling fondly into those lovely upturned eyes.

"Neither," she answered, with a steadfast look; "and I am sure I do not know why I should have said that. Of course we shall always love each other. There is nothing in the wide, wide world that would make me love or trust you less than I do at this moment!"

"Nothing?—are you sure, Margaret?"

"*Nothing*—unless you should dishonor yourself; and that," she added, with beautiful trust, "I *know* you will never do."

Louis Dunbar's face grew luminous. He clasped her close to his strong, manly heart, kissed once again those red lips that had spoken such loving words to him, then opened the door and stepped forth into the night.

"How dark it is!" said Margaret, looking out, and loth even then to let him go.

Did something warn her of the dread mystery that was about to enwrap him as with a shroud?

With one more hand-clasp, they parted, she to go to her beautiful rooms above, he to go—where?

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## CHAPTER XX.

### A STRANGE DEED.

Morning dawned—a clear, beautiful day. Margaret Houghton awoke with smiles upon her lips, a deeper love-light in her eyes, and her heart thrilling with the glory of loving and being loved.

She had dreamed such tender, beautiful dreams of her beloved, and the bright future awaiting them, and to-day Louis was to speak to her father regarding their wedding-day—to-day it was to be decided when she would become his wife.

Suddenly a vigorous peal of the bell broke in upon her tender musings—a peal that seemed to have an ominous and threatening sound to her.

It was not answered promptly, and was followed by

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another peal, more imperative and startling than before.

Then she heard the door open, and some one speaking in quick, stern tones. Next, there were sounds of hurried footsteps on the stairs, then a rap upon her father's door, a few words spoken in low, rapid tones; after that silence.

Five minutes later she heard her father come forth from his chamber and hasten below.

What did these unusual proceedings mean? and why need she experience that sudden sensation of impending evil, that creeping horror, as if she feared some dreadful blow was about to fall and crush out all the light of her life?

She threw on a white wraper, thrust her small feet into a pair of slippers, and hurried down to the lower hall, where she found her father and another man talking together in low, excited tones.

"You are sure he has not been here?" she heard the stranger say.

"No, he has not been here since last evening. He left, I believe, a little before ten," Mr. Houghton replied. "But what is the trouble? You have not told me—you only hinted at something wrong?"

Margaret never forgot the cold chills that ran over her frame, nor the agony that was crowded into that brief instant, while she waited for the man's reply. Neither he nor her father knew that she was there, for their faces were turned from her, and she had come upon them so noiselessly that they had not heard a sound.

"He has not been at the office this morning, and he is usualy there before, or as soon as any one, and—the safe was found unlocked and robbed of its contents."

Mr. Houghton grew pale.

"Was there much money in it?" he asked.

"Two hundred thousand francs, monsieur."

"Two hundred thousand francs—forty thousand dollars," cried Mr. Houghton, aghast.

"*Oui, monsieur;* we have been in his apartments—he is not there. Nothing was disarranged; his bed was untumbled, he had not been home all night; and, pardon monsieur, we have now come to search for him here."

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A small white hand was at this moment laid upon Mr. Houghton's arm.

He turned. His daughter stood beside him, her face as colorless as her dress, while she looked like some fair spirit that had just floated down from above.

"It is Louis of whom you are speaking?" she questioned, and her white lips seemed to move mechanically, her eyes were filled with a look of anguish such as her father hoped he might never see in them again.

"Yes," he answered, while he held her hand in his own and began to stroke it tenderly, for it was so icy cold, and almost chilled him.

"He was here, you know, last evening," Margaret explained; "he left about fifteen minutes to ten—the clock struck the quarter just as we left the parlor. I urged him to stay, as it was not late; but he said he was anxious—there was a large amount of money in his office, and he could not rest until he had been there to see that everything was safe and right for the night."

"Ah!" exclaimed the man, who was listening breathlessly to what she said.

"Ah!" echoed Mr. Houghton; but a different thought flashed through each brain.

"He has been followed, robbed, and perhaps murdered," was Mr. Houghton's inward reflection, with a sinking heart.

"He has robbed the safe and fled with the money," commented the other to himself.

"You have not seen him since last evening at a quarter to ten, mademoiselle?" he questioned, regarding the young girl searchingly.

"No," she murmured, shivering slightly, for the man's tone jarred upon her, and she feared that something dreadful must have happened to Louis.

"Monsieur will not object to his house being searched?" remarked the man, turning to Mr. Houghton.

"Certainly not," he replied, with dignity.

The man stepped to the door and beckoned to some one without, and instantly a gendarme entered, and presented a paper to Mr. Houghton.

It was a search-warrant, showing that all objections on

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his part would have been useless, if he had offered any.

Margaret, seeing it, reeled where she stood, and putting out both hands, convulsively grasped her father's arm.

"Why should they wish to search the house?" she asked, huskily. "Do they believe that he—Louis—has taken this money, and gone away with it?"

"I fear so," he admitted, reluctantly.

The beautiful girl drew herself up haughtily. Her lips curled; her eyes flashed with scorn as she turned them upon the intruders, who were regarding her with undisguised admiration.

"It is utterly impossible," she said, coldly. "Mr. Dunbar could not do such a deed."

"Pardon, mademoiselle," politely returned the man who had interviewed her father. "No one has a key to the safe save Mr. Dunbar and the cashier; this morning it was found open, with his key in the lock, the money gone—a very large and tempting amount too. Mr. Dunbar is missing, and no trace of him in all Paris. We must do our duty, mademoiselle; we have been ordered to find Mr. Dunbar; we must search for him here—everywhere."

"It is utterly impossible; he could not do it!" Margaret repeated.

Then, as the men passed on about their business, she suddenly broke down and threw herself into her father's arms. He led her into the parlor, placed her in a comfortable chair before the cheerful grate, and then went to call his wife.

Everything certainly looked very dark and mysterious, and his own heart was disturbed by anxious forebodings. The robbery had been done with the key belonging to Louis! the cashier's key was still in his own possession, the other was found in the lock of the safe, the door of which was wide open, while not a book nor a paper had been disturbed—the money drawers alone were empty.

The two hundred thousand francs had been paid in just before the hour for closing the office, and the cashier stated that Mr. Dunbar had seemed troubled and anxious when it was delivered to him, for it was past banking

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hours, and it would have to be kept in the office until morning.

He had remained to superintend the locking of the safe; had examined every window and tried every door after it was fastened.

All this the cashier testified to under oath, and declared that he believed that there had been foul play in the matter, for Mr. Dunbar was not a man likely to do a dirty piece of business like that; he was a gentleman and no robber. He believed that somebody must have suspected the presence of the money and shadowed him, and, when he returned to see that everything was right about the office, robbed him of the key, and perhaps murdered him.

Of course no trace of Louis was discovered in the Houghton mansion, and the officers having done their duty, apologized for their intrusion, and were about to withdraw, when Margaret suddenly remembered what her lover had told her regarding his father.

She quickly related the facts to Mr. Houghton, who repeated them to the officers, and they beat a hasty retreat, their opinions greatly changed, and believing they would soon bring the real rogue to justice.

Great excitement prevailed in the city over the strange affair; but when it came to be known that Mr. Dunbar had a father in Paris whose character was questionable, many not knowing of his engagement to the wealthy Miss Houghton, who had before been inclined to believe that he himself had absconded with the handsome sum, now decided that the father was the guilty party, and had sacrificed his own son to his greed for gold.

There was deep grief in the Houghton mansion. It seemed almost as if there had been a death there.

Margaret was nearly wild with anxiety and suspense, for she imagined that Louis had met with a horrible fate.

During the early part of the day Arthur Aspinwall dropped in upon the troubled family.

"I am so lonesome since Uncle Albert went away that I do not know what to do with myself," he apologized, as he entered the room where the household was gathered; then he started:

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"What is the matter?" he asked, looking from one to the other of the sorrowful group and remarking their blank, white faces and despondent attitude.

Mr. Houghton drew him aside.

"Haven't you heard of the robbery of last night?" he asked.

"No; where was it? I have not been quite well for a day or two—arose late this morning, took my breakfast in my room, and then came directly here. Who has been robbed?"

"Dunbar's office was robbed of forty thousand dollars last night, and Louis himself is missing."

"The deuce!" exclaimed the young man, in a startled tone.

Mr. Houghton then explained the circumstances as far as he knew them, remarking that suspicion was directed against the young man's father.

"Father? Dunbar has no father," returned Arthur, in a derisive tone. "He was always preaching that there was a mystery shadowing his parentage."

Mr. Houghton then enlightened him further upon the subject.

"Um!" remarked Arthur, reflectively, when the elder gentleman had concluded. "You don't suppose that this —this story of a father is a trumped-up affair to throw people upon the wrong scent, do you?"

"Not for a moment," returned Mr. Houghton, with indignant emphasis. "Louis Dunbar is the soul of honor. What would that comparatively paltry sum be to him, when he might have married Margaret in a month with three or four times that amount."

"True; no, no, he would not be likely to sacrifice so much for so little," Arthur responded, but his lips were firmly compressed, and his tone was strained and unnatural.

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## CHAPTER XXI.

### A RIVAL'S THEORY.

Days passed, but no clew to the robbery was obtained, and no intelligence of Louis Dunbar. Gradually the

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excitement subsided, and matters settled into their old grooves once more.

The cashier was appointed to take Louis' place, one of the other clerks was put into his position, and a new man procured to fill that vacancy; and though the loss to the company was great, and would long be felt, yet business was soon resumed with all its former activity.

At the Houghton mansion, however, there was great sadness. For a time it seemed as if Margaret would sink under the dreadful blow, and her friends were exceedingly anxious on her account, and proposed to hasten their return to America, hoping that change of air and scene might blunt the memory of these recent horrors.

"Go home to America!" she exclaimed, with sudden anguish, when the plan was proposed to her. "Papa, *never* speak to me again of it. I should die before we could cross the ocean. No, no; if Paris has been Louis' tomb, it shall be mine also. I will live here as long as I can. When I die, if I die before we learn what has happened to him, bury me here where I last saw him; but I cannot, *cannot* go home."

Of course they said no more to her after that upon the subject.

She was their all. They lived only in and for her, and her every wish should be gratified as far as it was in their power to do so.

But how their hearts ached over this early blighting of all her hopes it is not in the power of pen to describe, and there was not a sadder home in all Paris than theirs, where lately there had been nothing but sunshine and joy.

Mrs. Parker and her daughter returned to America without their friends, and for a time, Mrs. Houghton, who was fondly attached to her friend, and had been greatly comforted by her kindness and sympathy during her recent trouble, felt as if half the world was gone.

Arthur Aspinwall came every day to bring some offering, or to speak some word of cheer and sympathy.

He did not intrude himself upon Margaret, but devoted himself to Mrs. Houghton, and really made him-

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self so agreeable and helpful that she grew to watch for his coming with pleasure.

He seldom said much to Margaret, but his manner toward her was gentle and deprecatory, and he was so kind and thoughtful in anticipating her slightest wish that she was sure he regretted those bitter words he had uttered against Louis on that last eventful evening.

Mr. Forest had not returned, neither had he written anything regarding his movements; and, as Arthur was thus kept in ignorance of his whereabouts, he could not inform him of Louis' disappearance and the trouble that the Houghtons were in.

"I hope I shall not wear my welcome out," Arthur said, one day, when he dropped in, for the second time, and threw himself wearily into a chair; "but, the truth is, I am so lonely I can't stay by myself."

"Come as often as you like," Mrs. Houghton replied, kindly. "We are lonely, too, without our friends, and I know you must miss Mr. Forest sadly."

"Yes, and—I am decidedly upset over the mystery regarding Dunbar," the young man returned, in a low tone, as if he intended the remark for Mrs. Houghton's ears alone.

"Hush!" she whispered, with a warning glance toward Margaret, and a few moments after, wishing something from her room, she arose and went up stairs to get it.

Margaret had always receiver Arthur of late rather apathetically. To-day she had merely nodded a greeting as he entered, then lay back in her chair by the fire, and fell again into painful reverie.

But she had heard that last remark of his to her mother, in spite of his low tone, and suddenly sitting erect she turned her great languid eyes upon him, and gazed at him fixedly.

He became conscious of her look after a moment, although his face was turned away from her.

It made him very uncomfortable somehow, and he wished he had not mentioned the name of his rival at all.

He bore her scrutiny as long as he could, then he turned and met her glance.

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"Well, what is it?" he asked, smiling, and trying to look indifferent.

"You never appeared to entertain a very high regard for Louis, and I was rather surprised to hear you express yourself as so 'upset' over his strange disappearance," Margaret returned, with some bitterness in her tone, but without removing her eyes from his, while she kept locking and unlocking her hands in a nervous manner.

A wave of color shot up to Arthur Aspinwall's forehead at her words.

There was a moment of awkward silence; then he admitted, with a half-defiant, half-humble air:

"I confess I was wretchedly jealous of him, Margie."

Margaret's eyes began to burn with an ominous light, but she made no reply.

"I could not hep it," he went on, encouraged by her silence. "I—I had cared for you all my life, and I could not be reconciled to the fact *he* should win your favor so easily when I had failed so utterly after so many years of devotion."

The girl's golden-fringed lids drooped over her lustrous eyes, which were every moment growing brighter and brighter, while a spot of fire glowed on either cheek.

"But," Arthur continued, growing bolder as he found the ice so easily broken, "I am not destitute of feeling, Margie; I have not been insensible to your misery, and I am, believe me, sincerely sorry for you," he concluded, with a tender inflection.

She shivered slightly, and drew nearer the fire, as if she felt cold, while her face suddenly grew deadly white again.

They were silent for several minutes, during which the young man watched her with a troubled expression.

Suddenly she turned toward him, with a swift, impulsive movement.

"Arthur, do you hear anything said now?" she asked.

"About—Dunbar?"

"Yes."

"Not much. Now and then the fellows at the club

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mention him; but, like all other mysterious and unsatisfactory topics, it has gradually been dropped."

"What is *your* theory regarding his disappearance?—you have never told me," she questioned, leaning toward him, and reading his face with searching eyes.

He moved uneasily in his chair. He glanced into her eager face and wondered at the strange expression that rested upon it, and he, too, grew a trifle pale as he replied:

"I do not like to tell you, Margie."

"Why not?"

"Because—because—good gracious! you have told me never to say it again; but you tempt me beyond my strength—because, Margie, I still love you too well to want to hurt you in any way."

The hot, crimson tide leaped up to the young girl's waxen neck and throat; and then up, up it surged and surged until it dyed her whole face with scarlet. Controlling her emotions after a few moments, she said, in a calm tone:

"I have been hurt all that I can be already; tell me your theory."

He regarded her uneasily.

"I thought at first that he had become the victim of foul play," he said, at last.

"You thought so at first; have you changed your opinion?"

"I am obliged to confess that I have."

"What has caused you to do so?"

"The fact that the detectives have not obtained the slightest clew to anything of the kind. These French detectives are very keen, nothing tangible escapes them, and if Louis Dunbar has been mur—made away with, they would have got hold of something pointing to such a crime before this."

"Then you do not believe he has been——"

A shudder completed the sentence which her lips could not finish.

"No, Margie," he answered gently.

"What, then, can have become of him?"

Arthur was silent.

"Tell me," she commanded, peremptorily.

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"How can I, Margie? why will you compel me to be cruel to you!" he asked, tenderly.

She shrugged her shoulders impatiently.

She lifted her head with something of her old haughty, imperious grace.

"I will know. Tell me what you think has become of Louis," she insisted.

"Well, if I must, remember I do so under protest."

He paused as if reluctant to go on even then.

She lifted her great eyes and waited for the answer.

"I am forced to believe," he said, deliberately, though with downcast eyes, "that he disappeared of his own accord."

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## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE MISSING DIAMOND.

Margaret Houghton never moved as Arthur Aspinwall uttered those significant words. They did not appear to surprise her.

Her face was unfathomable in its expression; her eyes were downcast, and there was not so much as a flutter of an eyelid to show that she experienced the least emotion at the suggestion of her lover's dishonesty.

But if the young man could have seen her hands he would have noticed that they were locked in a strained, convulsive clasp.

He had expected that she would indignantly repudiate the idea which he had advanced.

That she did not caused him considerable surprise, while at the same time it created a feeling of secret joy. If he could instill into her mind a belief that Louis was a villain and a robber, it would be comparatively easy to win her thoughts from him, and gradually lead her to look more favorably upon himself.

"Do I understand you to believe that Mr. Dunbar stole that money and absconded with it?"

The voice was hollow, almost unearthly; but otherwise Margaret gave no sign of emotion.

"That is putting it in very plain, disagreeable terms,"

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Arthur replied, gently; "but I cannot help thinking so. In the first place, no one save him and the cashier knew anything about the money having been in the office. Second, no one but they had a key to the safe. The cashier produced his the next morning; Dunbar's was in the lock."

"But some one may have assaulted and overpowered him—stolen his key, and then taken the money," interposed Margaret.

"There would have been some evidence of it then; there would have been a struggle for the possession of the key; in that case there must have been some disorder and signs of it. If he had been felled and killed instantly, as your father believes, the body would have had to be taken care of, and the detectives would have traced it before this."

Again Margaret shivered and drew nearer the fire. It was dreadful to hear Louis spoken of as a "body."

"I told you I should hurt you; I cannot bear to wound you, Margie," Arthur said, in unsteady tones, as he noticed it.

She made no reply, but sat a long time silent; so long that the stillness became oppressive to her companion.

At last he could bear it no longer, and, rising, he crossed over to where she sat.

"Forgive me," he said, in a low, earnest tone. "I feared this would open your wound afresh, and I would rather suffer torture than give you pain."

"You need not feel at all conscience-smitten—for this; I questioned you—if I suffer, I alone am to blame."

There was a peculiar significance in the construction and emphasis of the first half of her reply that made him very uncomfortable. What did she mean by it?

"I am going now," he said, after a moment. "I feel like an intruder here; you do not receive me very graciously, Margie. Would you rather I staid away altogether?"

"No," she at last said, slowly, but without lifting her eyes. "I think I should miss you if you did not come at all; but Arthur, if you continue your visits, you must not talk of love to me any more; I cannot bear that."

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His face lighted eagerly in spite of that last prohibition, and his heart bounded within him.

She had said she would miss him if he did not come at all; she had given him permission to visit her, with only one restriction.

He felt almost sure now that he should win her in time. All he needed was patience and perseverance.

Ah! if this beautiful girl would only become his wife, and he could have the handling of her gold, also, there would be nothing more to ask for in this life.

"Thank you," he said, and his voice trembled, in spite of his effort to prevent it, with hope. "Then I shall come every day until you send me away; and now good-by for this time."

He held out his hand as he spoke.

She could not help seeing it, but she hesitated a moment and shrank slightly from him; then, with a sudden movement, she laid hers for an instant in his palm.

It was like a piece of ice—so cold that it actually chilled him.

"How cold you are!" he cried. "Margie, your hand could not be colder if you were dead."

"No, nor my heart, either," she moaned, bitterly; and turning abruptly from him, she motioned him to go.

When Margaret heard the door close after him she sprang from her chair and began to pace wildly up and down the room; her hands were clasped upon her breast, her face raised heavenward, while the tears fell like rain over her wan cheeks.

Her mother found her thus, a little while after, when she came down from her own room.

"My darling," she said, going to her and taking her tenderly into her arms, "you must not allow yourself to become so unnerved and excited. I know your heart is nearly broken, and we suffer with you, Margie; but, my child, do not forget that our anguish would be a hundredfold more poignant if we should lose you, our only one."

Margaret paused in her rapid walk, slipped her arms about her mother's waist, and laid her head wearily upon her shoulder.

For nearly five minutes she stood thus, then she

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raised her face and tried to smile—oh, such a pitiful smile!

"I am a great deal of trouble to you, mamma," she said, humbly; "but I will try not to grieve you like this again. Let us go out and drive for a little while; go in the close carriage. I imagine the cool air will do me good."

Mrs. Houghton was astonished at this request. No amount of urging heretofore had prevailed upon her to go out. Not once had she stepped outside the door since the dreadful blow fell, and now she was asking to go and drive.

She gave her no time to change her mind. In fifteen minutes they were driving in the brilliant sunshine out toward the Champs Elysées.

It did her much good. She came home brighter and more cheerful. There was no more color in her face than usual; but that look of blank misery was softened, the tones of her voice were less strained and unnatural, while there was an expression of thoughtfulness and resolve upon her countenance that told of some new purpose formed within her heart.

Mr. Houghton was greatly gratified upon learning of this new departure.

It was a good beginning, and, now that the ice was broken, he resolved that he would find something interesting for her outside every day.

Arthur came again the next morning, and he also noticed the change in Margaret.

She was less reserved than usual, joining more freely in conversation than she had yet done, and even smiled slightly once at some pleasantry between himself and Mrs. Houghton.

That lady informed him that they were going for a drive on the boulevards at two, and invited him to accompany them.

He hesitated for a moment, then, with evident disappointment, said he could not go at that hour; he had an important engagement that would require his presense elsewhere.

Something, a sort of fascination of mesmeric power,

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perhaps, made him lift and turn his eyes upon Margaret as he said this.

She was observing him with a keen, penetrating look; it was a strange look, a questioning look; and then, as his glance encountered hers, her eyes suddenly fell, and a slight, a very slight flush, tinged her cheek.

The young man was startled; he could not understand it; hitherto she had hardly noticed his presence, now it seemed as if nothing escaped her observation.

His heart bounded.

"She is disappointed; she wanted me to go," he said to himself. "Patience is all I need; I shall get on with her all right yet; but I must not be too eager—I must make myself very agreeable and necessary to her, and yet be a trifle shy."

"I am sorry I cannot go," he said aloud, "but I will arrange it so as to accompany you after to-day if you wish."

Again he was conscious of that swift, intent, penetrating glance from Margaret; what could it mean?

"Thanks—it is pleasant to have an escort when one drives out for several miles," Mrs. Houghton replied, "and we choose this hour because it is warmer and pleasanter and there is not so much danger of Margie taking cold. But Arthur," she added, as he was moving toward the door, "you are lame. What is the trouble?"

The young man changed color slightly, and then laughed as he replied:

"Yes, I am a trifle unsteady; I turned my ankled coming down stairs yesterday; it came near being a bad sprain, and after sitting still for a while I find it a little difficult to start off naturally. I shall be all right in a few days, however. By the way," he added, as he was about to leave the room, "I wonder if you or any of your servants have seen anything of a stray diamond about as large as a pea? I have lost one out of a sleeve-button."

He turned back the sleeve of his coat as he spoke, revealing a handsome cuff-button of black enamel and gold, out of the center of which there appeared to be a stone gone.

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Margaret arose from her chair and came swiftly to his side.

"Let me see," she said, with an eagerness that surprised both of her companions.

"I have seen nothing of it and I do not believe that the servants have; but I will have them look very carefully when they sweep again," Mrs. Houghton said.

"What makes you think that you lost it here?" Margaret asked, while a maid just then entered and spoke to her mother, and she went out leaving Arthur and Margaret alone.

"Oh, I have no particular reason for thinking so, only I am here so much, and I thought it might possibly have dropped out during one of my calls," Arthur replied, smiling.

"When did you miss it?"

"Let me see—it was some time ago, and I meant to have asked about it before, but kept forgetting it. I believe though, it was that very evening after you had told me about—this," he concluded, lowering his tone and gently touching with his finger the diamond which she had told him was the pledge of affection between herself and Louis.

For a moment Margaret stood absolutely motionless, as if riveted to the spot by some sudden thought.

"Why!" she exclaimed, "that was the very night that Louis was—that Louis disappeared!"

A shock went through him, and for a moment there was a deathlike stillness in the room.

"So it was!" he said, at last, in a forced tone. "It did not occur to me before, however," he added, with a regretful intonation, "forgive me again, Margie, I seem fated to wound you continually, and—never mind the stone; I suppose I can have another put in its place, though I am sorry to lose it, for my mother gave me the buttons on my twenty-first birthday."

"We will look for it," Margaret returned, "it may have rolled into some corner, or behind some piece of furniture and escaped observation. You sat over here in this chair, didn't you?"

She had turned abruptly away from him while speak-

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ing, and walked to the place where he had sat when he said such hard things of her lover.

How well she remembered it! his very look, even the tones of his voice and the passionate gestures he had made.

The chair was close by the *tête-à-tête* where she and Louis had afterward sat and planned so hopefully for their future.

"I believe so," he replied, absently, while his quick eye glanced rapidly all about that corner of the room.

She was watching him breathlessly, fixedly, and with a glance that was almost like that of a mad woman, waiting for a chance to spring upon her victim, she did not lose a movement that he made.

"We will look carefully," she repeated, and he wondered at the sudden interest that she manifested in this trifle after all her previous apathy about everything else.

"Thanks," he said, as he again turned to go. "I should be glad to get it; but pray do not put yourself out too much on account of it."

Then, with a smiling good-by, he went out, leaving her standing alone by that chair, a strangely intent look on her fair young face.

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

### A NOVEL PASTIME.

Margaret stood motionless until she heard the door close after him. Then she glided into that corner of the room where she and her lover had sat that last night, and getting down upon her knees, she began to look carefully all about for Arthur's missing diamond. She moved the *tête-à-tête* aside, and lifting the draperies from the floor, searched carefully along the edge of the carpet, but she found nothing.

"I do not believe he lost it here," she said; "but he lost it that night, and—where?"

She was about to rise from her kneeling posture when her attention was atracted by the arrangement of the rich curtains where they were drawn back from the win-

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dow and the arch between the two rooms and fastened in folds in the corner.

"How awkwardly the girls arrange these things," Margaret said.

She took the massive tassels in her hands, untied the heavy cords, and was on the point of shaking out the draperies preparatory to gathering them up more gracefully, when something made her stop. The next moment she was bending over them even closer than before.

"Ah!"

It was a sharp, startled cry that broke from her. And what she saw was sufficient to cause any one a shock of surprise, for there, caught among the overshot threads and almost in the heart of a rich crimson rose, like a great drop of glittering dew, was a pure, gleaming diamond.

"It is his!" she cried, in a breathless voice, "but how came it here?"

She stood as if paralyzed for a moment; then with resolution evident in her pale face, she added:

"I have a clew at last; but, oh! it is such a slight one, I fear it will lead to nothing tangible. Nevertheless, I shall follow it, if it takes me as long as I live."

* * * * * * * *

The next day Mrs. Houghton's maid was taken violently ill, and their physician, upon being called, pronounced her disease to be fever of a malignant type, and advised that she be removed at once from the house, as Miss Houghton, in her present delicate condition, was liable to take it.

So the poor girl was removed to her own home—being fortunate enough to have one in the city—and a trained nurse was provided to give her proper care.

Every day Mrs. Houghton drove out to see how she was progressing, and Margaret accompanied her, although she was not allowed to alight, her mother going in alone to ascertain the needs of her maid, and to carry her comforts and delicacies.

The house where she was ill was an humble one, in a narrow street, which had once been an important business locality. Years before there had been a fine array

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of shops and bazaars upon one side of it, while upon the other immense warehouses loomed gloomily above them.

But as the tide of humanity rolled more and more into the city, pushing and crowding into every available nook and corner, business interests had gradually been removed to the more aristocratic portions of the town, and the buildings on the south side of the street had been made over into dwellings for the poorer classes, and those on the north rented for storage, or left empty and deserted.

It was not a pleasant locality, but rents were low there, and as the poor are forced to take what they can get for their money, they flocked into every available space.

It was a singular fact, however, that people shunned the side of the street that was uninhabited; the sidewalk there was almost deserted, while the opposite one was teeming with life. After dark the inhabitants of that place were disinclined to walk in the shadows of those great, gloomy buildings, and thus, after a time, the belief gradually prevailed that they were haunted.

Into this place, however, Margaret Houghton and her mother drove every day upon their errand of mercy, and after Mrs. Houghton alighted, the driver was in the habit of turning his horses about and turning up to the opposite sidewalk, while waiting for her reappearance, in order to be out of the way of other vehicles passing through.

Thus Margaret sat in the carriage one day, waiting for her mother, who, for some reason, remained much longer than usual with Annette, her maid.

The young girl was extremely nervous and impatient that afternoon. She was sitting nearly opposite a narrow alley, which led at right ankles through to another street running parallel with the one they were on. She had never noticed it before, but now she saw that there were entrances all along, as far as her eye could reach, to the empty buildings on her right.

Suddenly her attention was attracted by seeing a man come out of one of these doors in the alley—the third one from the corner.

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Apparently, he was an old man, having white hair, and a full, grizzle beard. He was very ordinarily dressed, wearing a long, coarse gray coat, a tall black hat of somewhat antiquated shape, and cheap, thick shoes.

He stopped a moment to lock the door after him, after which he tried it to see if he had fastened it securely; then he turned and came down the alley toward the street, swinging his keys carelessly in his hand.

Margaret noticed the keys particularly—there were two of them—because one hit against the other, making a little musical ring; and she saw, too, that they were fastened together by a small brass chain.

She drew back out of the man's sight, although she still watched him, as he came out of the alley almost facing her: but his head was bent as if in deep thought, and at first he did not appear to observe the carriage standing so quietly there.

When he did, however, he gave a start of surprise, and shot a keen glance at the driver sitting so dignifiedly upon his box. Then he swept a startled look into the carriage, and though he could not see Margaret, she caught the brilliant flash of those eyes, and her heart gave a frightened bound.

The next moment he resumed his thoughtful mien, and passed on, up toward the larger and broader street which crossed, a few blocks above, the one he was on.

The minute his back was turned, Margaret leaned out of the carriage window and closely watched him. She noticed that he *limped* slightly as he walked—limped with the *left foot*—and also that the ungloved hand, from which the keys were still swinging, was not the hand of an old man at all, but white, and delicate, and rose-tipped, like a lady's.

She watched him out of sight until he turned a corner, then she sank back, weak and trembling, among the cushions of the carriage, where Mrs. Houghton found her soon after, white as death and as strengthless as an infant.

"I have tired you out, Margie, keeping you waiting here in the cold so long," she cried, in a voice of self-

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reproach. "I believe I will never bring you into this dismal place again."

"I think I am rather more tired than usual, mamma," Margaret answered, weakly; "there is a disagreeable chill, too, in the air to-day; but I shall be all right again when we get where there is a cheerful fire and I am rested. How did you find Annette this afternoon?"

"She is much better, and declares that she will be able to return to us by another week," Mrs. Houghton answered.

In spite of her assurance that she would be all right when she was rested, Margaret did not get over the effects of her excitement for a day or two, but seemed nervous, depressed, and preoccupied, while she would start violently and glance about her in a half-frightened way at every unusual sound.

The third day, however when Arthur Aspinwall called, he found a pleasant change in her. She was looking much better, while she seemed more cheerful and animated than she had appeared since her lover's disappearance.

She greeted him very cordially, and immediately fell into a social chat with him, and was so kind and affable that he could hardly believe she was the same person.

"Come and see what I am doing," she said to him, after a while, and, rising, she led him to a table at the other end of the room, and upon which there stood a glass case, having a black velvet bed within it, to which various coins and curious designs in red sealing wax were attached.

"Ah, you are making a collection of coins, Margie," he said, bending down to examine them more closely.

"Yes; I began it several years ago, and for a time was very much interested in it; but after a while I grew weary of it and put my case away. It occurred to me, however, a few days ago, that I had plenty of time now and a good opportunity to gain something new, being in a foreign country, so I have brought it forth, hoping to get some amusement out of it."

"You have quite a variety of coins—some rare ones, too," Arthur observed.

"Yes; there are two or three—these," touching them

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lightly with the tip of one of her dainty fingers—"that I have been very enticingly invited to dispose of upon two or three occasions. That very fact, however, only served to make me desire more earnestly to keep them."

"But what are these designs in red wax?" the young man inquired, turning his attention to them.

"These," pointing to four or five, "are copies of some rare medallions which a friend in Boston allowed me to take."

"But how were you able to reproduce them so nicely?"

"I made a mold, or impression, of plaster of Paris, and then melted my wax and filled it with it," Margaret explained.

"This is a queer device; may I ask what it is intended to represent?" Arthur asked, taking up a circular tablet that had received a curious impression.

Margaret gave him a swift, searching glance; but he did not observe it.

"Oh, that is a little invention of my own," she said, carelessly. "After making a copy of the medallions I spoke of, I conceived the idea of taking the impression of different kinds of keys. I first form my little tablet from melted wax," showing him one that was perfectly plain; "then, whenever I find a curiously shaped key, I heat it moderately and stamp it upon the smooth surface."

"That is a novel idea."

"Yes; and perhaps a foolish one; but I think very few people have any idea of the many curious keys that exist in the world; you perceive I have several that are very queer. By the way, haven't you something unique that you would allow me to take an impression from, to put with my collection?"

The question was lightly put, but a close observer would have seen that the young girl was waiting with considerable interest, if not anxiety, for his reply.

"I don't know of anything," Arthur answered, plunging his hands into his pockets and bringing forth several keys of various shapes and sizes.

Her eyes lighted for a moment as her quick glance passed from one to another; then a look of disappointment swept over her face.

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"Those are all modern," she said, indifferently. "I want something old and queer; have you no others?"

"Yes, I have others, but nothing very curious, I am afraid, unless it is one belonging to an old-fashioned valise that was my grandfather's."

"Anything will be acceptable. Suppose you bring all you have around to-morrow and let me select from them."

She spoke nervously, and with an unusual flush on her cheek.

"Very well, I will," Arthur replied, and then he stood watching, while she gathered up her treasures and carefully replaced them in their case.

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

### ARTHUR'S INVITATION ACCEPTED.

"Will you drive with me this afternoon, Margie?" Arthur asked, when, after she had arranged the contents of her case to suit her, they went back and resumed their seats by the fire. "I have to exercise Uncle Albert's horses every day, and a fellow gets rather lonesome going out by himself."

Margaret did not reply to him at once, but stooped to pick up a pin from the floor to hide the sudden pallor of her face.

Then she lifted her eyes with a glance that was strangely bright and penetrating, and said:

"Thanks; I think I will, since you are so kind as to ask me. Mamma has an engagement that will keep her at home this afternoon, and the day is beautiful for driving."

Was her heart at last beginning to respond to the wild passion surging in his own,

"Where would you like to go:" he asked, yet not daring to look at her lest she should see the joy and triumph in his eyes.

"Anywhere you like; it does not matter to me, so that I have the ride," she replied. "By the way, when did you hear from Mr. Forest last?"

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"I have heard from him only once since he left the city, and that was yesterday. His letter was not very satisfactory, either—merely a business epistle, and mentioned that he should be obliged to be absent some time longer. It was written from London."

"Does—he know of—of our trouble here?" Margaret asked, with downcast eyes and faltering speech.

A frown contracted her companion's brow.

"No; I have not known where to address him until now, so could not write to him. Doubtless he would be grieved to learn of Dunbar's misfortune, notwithstanding that he was almost an entire stranger to him."

Arthur Aspinwall had grown very white while making the above statement.

Was it because of his hatred for the young man, or because Margaret's question showed that, no matter what she might do or plan, her lover was never absent from her thoughts?

He pulled forth his watch impatiently, and arose.

"I must be off and leave word at the stable for the carriage to be in readiness for our drive," he said. "I will call for you at two o'clock."

Promptly at two a beautiful carriage, to which there were attached a pair of spirited bays, in handsome silver-mounted harness, swept up to the door of the Houghton mansion, and two minutes later the fair daughter of the house came forth, looking more beautiful, Arthur thought, as he took his seat beside her, than he had ever seen her before.

Just as they were about to start, Margaret turned to him and asked:

"Arthur, will you allow the driver to take us around to Annette's before we go on our drive? I have a little package that I want to leave there."

"Of course I will, Margie," he answered, smiling; "but where does Annette live?"

"No. 84 Rue de Blanc."

Why were those eyes of wonderful blue fixed so intently upon him as she gave the street and number? he asked himself.

"Ah!" he said, "84 Rue de Blanc?"

"Do you know where it is?" she questioned.

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"I presume the driver does, if I do not. Pierre, do you know where No. 84 Rue de Blanc is?"

"*Oui, monsieur.*"

"Then drive directly there."

"Are you comfortable?" he continued, bending forward to wrap the robe more closely about Margaret, though he was so awkward about it that the driver reached over to assist him, while a significant smile wreathed his lips.

"Very," she replied. "But you?—you are almost shivering, and you are as white as a ghost."

"It is nothing," he answered, impatiently, and turning away from her great, searching eyes.

"I believe there is an unusual chill in the air to-day," he added, "but the sun is bright, and we shall soon forget it."

They were not long in reaching the Rue de Blanc, and as they turned into it, Arthur Aspinwall swept one swift, comprehensive glance down its narrow length.

"What a strange street," he exclaimed; "one side of it is teeming with life, the other is as dreary and deserted as if there were no people in the world."

"Yes. Were you never here before?"

"No."

The driver stopped before 84.

Miss Houghton gave him a small package and asked him to leave it at the door, as she did not wish to get out.

He did as he was requested, remounted his box, turned his horses about and began to retrace the way they had come.

As they came opposite the narrow alley which had attracted Margaret's attention a few days previous, and from which she had seen that old man emerge, she leaned forward and remarked:

"What a gloomy passage. I wonder where it leads?"

"Pierre, where does that alley lead—upon what street?" questioned Arthur, of the driver.

"Rue Castiglione, monsieur."

"*Rue Castiglione!*" repeated Margaret, with faltering lips and a pained, startled look.

Louis Dunbar's office was on the Rue Castiglione!

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"Margie," said Arthur, suddenly, "I do not think this is a proper locality for you to frequent."

"Why not?" she asked, regarding him with that searching look, which of late had made him so uncomfortable.

"The reason is self-evident," he returned with a shrug of his shoulders. "It is certainly very disagreeable here, and, I should say, hardly safe for ladies who wear diamonds, watches, and other fine jewelry."

"Oh, I never come alone; mamma is always with me, and we come in a close carriage with a driver."

A swift pallor crept over the young man's face, she thought, but it was only for an instant.

"Still, it is a bad locality," he persisted.

"Well, we shall not be obliged to come much longer, for Annette is rapidly getting better, and will soon come back to us," Margaret replied, and she was confident she heard him breathe a sigh of relief at this assurance.

They drove several miles out, Arthur exerting himself to be social and entertaining, and recovering from his chilliness and pallor almost immediately after leaving the Rue de Blanc, while his spirits rose and he gave himself up entirely to the rare pleasure of having Margaret Houghton all to himself.

He was well versed in Paris gossip—hearing much at the club that he frequented—and he reeled off interesting items for her amusement; describing the last new opera and play, while Margaret listened with such apparent attention that he fondly imagined himself to be rapidly gaining ground with her, and flattered himself that her heart might, perhaps, after all, be caught on the rebound.

"Will you go again with me, Margie?" he asked, upon their return, as he assisted her to alight, and saw, with a thrill of delight, how red her lips had grown and the slight, beautiful tint that had come into her cheeks from contact with the keen, pure air. A swift flash, like the glancing of fire, came into her eyes at the question.

"If you repeat the invitation, I do not think I shall refuse," she answered, demurely.

"Thanks," he said, in a low, eager voice.

"The acknowledgments should be reversed, perhaps,"

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she returned; "but the carriage is easy, the horses superb, and," sweeping a keen look at him, *"taking everything into consideration,* I think the temptation you offer me is too strong to be resisted."

What did she mean by the strange construction and emphasis of her sentence?

He could not tell. His heart gave a great bound of delight at her words, and then sank in his bosom strangely depressed. The young girl was an enigma to him.

"You shall not lack for invitations, then," he murmured, clasping close the hand she had given him in alighting, and speaking with a tender cadence.

She shivered slightly, and withdrew her hand, while every atom of that lovely color which he so admired faded instantly out of her face; a sudden mist seemed to dull her eyes, and she caught her breath sharply. Surely she was a creature of strange moods!

"You are cold and tired, I fear," he said, as he accompanied her up the steps and rang the bell for her.

She did not answer, seeming to be preoccupied with some painful thought.

"By the way," he continued, after a moment, "I suppose that unlucky diamond of mine has not come to light yet?"

One of her gloves, which she had been drawing off while awaiting for the door to be opened, dropped upon the marble step at her feet.

She stooped to pick it up before answering.

"I have not heard either mamma or the housemaid say anything about it, although I know that they have searched for it," she said, at length.

"Well, I guess I shall have to give it up as lost," Arthur returned, while a shade of anxiety crossed his face. "Yet, even if I should never see it again, it would be some satisfaction to know how I happened to lose it."

Margaret was busy with the fastening of her other glove, and did not reply.

The servant at that moment answered their ring, and, bidding her good-by, Arthur returned to the carriage and was driven away, while Margaret went directly to

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her room, with a firm, resolute tread, a hard, steel-like glitter in her lovely eyes.

"An 'unlucky' diamond indeed!" she muttered between her white teeth, as she shut and locked the door after entering her chamber.

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## CHAPTER XXV.

### MR. ASPINWALL UNEASY.

It was later than usual, the next day, when Mrs. Houghton's coupé drove into the Rue de Blanc and stopped before the home of her servant, and the day being cloudy, it was almost dark as she alighted from the carriage.

"Jaques, you may go in with me and carry this basket and wait until it is emptied, while I see how Annette is; that is if you are sure the horses will stand quietly while you are gone," Mrs. Houghton said to the driver.

*"Oui, oui, madame,"* and he pointed to the heavy weight which he had attached to the bit of one of the noble creatures.

"Very well; we will not be gone long, Margie," Mrs. Houghton remarked to her daughter, and then the two disappeared within the house.

"It will take them ten minutes, at least, to unpack that basket," Margaret murmured, as she saw the door close after them. "I shall have time to do what I wish."

The next instant the door on the opposite side of the coupé was opened, a slight, darkly clad figure stepped out upon the ground and sped nimbly across the street in the gathering gloom.

She made directly for that narrow alley before mentioned, turned the corner, and passed quickly on until she came to the third door on the left.

She sprang up two or three stone steps, turned the handle, and tried to push the door open.

It was locked, as she had expected.

She bent her head, and put her ear to the keyhole, to listen.

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There was not a sound within the building; it was as silent as a tomb.

She pressed her face close against one of the small, diamond-shaped panes of glass which were upon each side of the entrance, and tried to peer into the gloomy hall; but all was dark as midnight, and she could see nothing.

She stepped back down the steps into the alley, and looking upward, counted three windows, one above another, and a dormer above those; showing that the building was more than three stories high.

Then, with a long-drawn sigh, she glided like a somber ghost from the place, sprang across the street beyond, and regained her seat in the carriage, panting and frightened, just as her mother and the coachman reappeared from the house of Annette's mother; the next moment they were driving toward home.

That evening, a dismal, rainy night, Arthur Aspinwall made his appearance in the Houghtons' parlors at an early hour.

He found them sitting cozily around a bright wood fire, and busily engaged in disposing of a basket of popcorn in true New England fashion.

It was one of these attractive, home-like pictures that do the heart good, and that is seldom seen in the heart of a foreign city like Paris.

Margaret was perfectly lovely, in a white cashmere *negligé*, with a full ruching of lace about her throat, and fastened with a cascade of white satin ribbons; a heavy cord, with massive tassels, was drawn about her waist, while her golden hair was gathered into a careless knot at the back of her small head and fastened with a silver arrow. Her only other ornament was that flashing diamond, with its guard, on the third finger of her left hand.

She sat on the right of the fire, her small feet, encased in bewitching slippers of bronze, surmounted by black velvet bows, resting upon a handsome crimson hassock.

She made a picture that an artist would have delighted in copying, and to Arthur Aspinwall nothing had ever seemed so beautiful.

"I got homesick enough to—to do almost anything desperate. I could not stay by myself another hour this

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dreary night," he said, with a rueful face, as he came into the room where this cheerful party was gathered. "You will think I am always lonesome and homesick," he added, flushing.

"Then you did the right thing to come to us," Mr. Houghton responded, cordially, as he arose to draw a chair forward for him. "Come and dry yourself, and eat a dish of our Yankee pop-corn; then, if agreeable to you, we will have an old-fashioned game of euchre."

"I should think you would get lonely, Arthur," Mrs. Houghton remarked, regarding him gravely. "What do you busy yourself with all day long?"

"Oh, I read, smoke, and look in upon the club, or drive on the boulevards."

Mr. Houghton turned upon him bluntly, and said, kindly, though bluntly:

"That kind of life isn't just the thing for a man of your years; why don't you do something, Aspinwall?"

"In what way?"

"Why, take up some employment—go into business—anything to make yourself useful."

"What could I find? I never did anything in my life in the way of work. I know nothing of business."

"Try book-keeping."

"I abominate figures."

"Well, I'll set you at work; you write a good hand. I can give you plenty of copying."

The young man shrugged his shoulders, thought a moment, then replied indifferently:

"Thank you. I'll think of it and let you know my decision when Uncle Albert returns; perhaps he may have different plans for me."

He glanced at Margaret as he spoke.

She was regarding him fixedly, while there was an unmistakable curl of contempt on her beautiful lips, which brought a hot flush to his cheek.

"Confound it! she measures everybody by that infernal puppy," he said to himself, wrathfully; "but if she imagines that I am ever going to make a drudge of myself, as he has done, she is mightily mistaken."

"This fire is very comfortable, and the corn tastes like old time at home," he said, to break the awkward pause

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that followed his last remark, and to change the subject. "The night is an ugly one outside, but no one would ever dream of it here; and now, if the rest of you desire, I believe I am ready for that game of euchre."

"All right. Come, Margie;" and Mr. Houghton sprang up, drew a small table into the glow of the fire, and arranged chairs about it.

Seating himself in one, he took a pack of cards from a drawer in the table, and began to shuffle them vigorously, for he was always eager for his favorite game.

Margaret left her corner at the grate, came forward, and quietly slipped into the seat opposite her father.

"Ah! going to play with me, my lady?" he questioned, with a fond glance into her fair face.

"Yes, sir. I know too much to allow you and mamma to have everything all your own way," she replied, with a significant smile.

Mr. Houghton laughed heartily as he began to deal, while Arthur, somewhat disappointed not to have Margaret for a partner, seated himself opposite Mrs. Houghton, and the play began.

They played for two hours, and at the end of that time the count was in favor of the father and daughter.

Margaret had seemed to concentrate all her powers upon the game, and had joined but very little in the general chat.

"How much in earnest you are, Margaret," Arthur observed, as he saw her perplexed face when once her father had "passed," and she was uncertain as to just what course she ought to pursue.

She flashed a lightning look at him, and it seemed to him as if there was something of defiance in it.

"Of course I am in earnest. I am playing against you with all my might. I am determined to beat you if such a thing is possible," she answered.

The words were lightly spoken, but, somehow they affected him unpleasantly. They grated upon his nerves, and made him angry in spite of himself. But he bent more closely to his own work after that.

"Whatever Margie does, whether it is work or play, she does it with her whole heart," Mrs. Houghton remarked, as she observed that he was stung by her remark.

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But, though they both did their best, they were badly beaten, and at ten o'clock Arthur arose from the table more nettled than he would have been willing to confess.

"That was pretty well done, my lady fair," said Mr. Houghton, winding his arm about his daughter's slight waist. "I never knew you to play so well before."

"Thank you, papa. It was diamond cut diamond, you know—when the enemy use keen weapons, we need to sharpen our own," she answered, with downcast eyes and flushed cheeks.

"I am afraid you have allowed yourself to get excited over the game; you are almost in a fever," he said, touching her hot face anxiously.

"Oh, no," Margaret replied, carelessly; "the room has only been getting too warm," but she turned away from him as if the subject was distasteful.

"By the way, my friends," Arthur suddenly remarked, "I came near forgetting something very important. Doubtless you all know that there is to be a grand *fête* here in Paris, to-morrow."

"Yes, great preparations are being made for it throughout the city; it will be a regular gala-day," returned Mr. Houghton.

"Well, I have a programme here," Arthur continued, taking a folded paper from his pocket, "and the route of the procession is all laid out. I noticed it is to pass through l'Avenue de l'Opera and directly past our rooms, which, as you know, are on a corner, and will therefore command a fine view of the whole thing. I had planned for you all to be my guests for the day, and enjoy the sights with me."

"That was very thoughtful of you, Arthur," Mrs. Houghton observed, appreciatively, "and of course we cannot resist such a temptation. We will all come—I only wish Mr. Forest had returned to make one of our number."

"I wish so, too," Arthur replied; then turning to Margaret who had said nothing regarding the plan, he asked: "Do you think you will enjoy it, Margie?"

"Oh, yes, I would like to see the procession; doubtless it will be very fine—all glitter and sparkle as these Parisians always are. I shall like, too, to see how you

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bachelors live," she added, appearing to feel more interested in that plan than in the procession.

"I did not suppose you ever gave a thought to that," he said, smiling. "I will come for you at ten, so as to avaid the crowd if possible."

As he spoke he arose to go.

"I see you have not got over that lameness yet, Arthur," remarked Mrs. Houghton, seeing that he limped slightly in going toward the door.

"No, not entirely—I always feel it more after sitting a long time, as I have done to-night."

He glanced back as he spoke, and was struck with the strange expression upon Margaret's face.

She stood leaning forward, observing him intently, her head slightly bent, her eyes fastened upon his feet, her face pale, a look of cunning mingled with fear in her dilated eyes.

As she felt his glance upon her, she suddenly stood erect, and met it with a look that he was sure had a flash of triumph in it.

The next instant she quietly remarked.

"It is your left foot, isn't it, Arthur?"

"Yes, and I am getting out of patience with it for being contrary so long."

"I should say you ought to have advice about it," she continued. "If you neglect it, the peculiarity of your gait may become permanent, and then," she added, more lightly, "if you should ever want to do anything wrong—commit a crime, for instance—it would be very easy to track you, no matter how you disguised yourself."

The young man started, flushed a quick, angry crimson, then grew as white as the collar about his neck.

"Why, Margaret, what—what a queer thing for you to say," he stammered. "What did you mean by it?"

"Oh, nothing that need to alarm you, I hope; only the idea struck me that it would be comparatively easy to track any one by such a peculiarity," she returned, composedly. "I still advise you to attend to it. It would have been wiser, though, if you had done so at the outset."

He searched her face keenly, but she had resumed her

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usual high-bred calm, and was carelessly toying with the silken cords that fastened her robe.

There was a frown upon his brow as he bade Mr. and Mrs. Houghton good-night, and he would have gone without a word to Margaret if she had not come forward of her own accord, and with a smile that he had no power to resist, said:

"Arthur, you have not brought me your keys yet. I am awaiting to take the impression of some of them. Have I treated you so badly to-night that you wish you could lock me up with one of them?"

"Lock you up?" he repeated, like one dazed by the question. Then recovering himself, and smiling back into the innocent eyes raised to his, he continued:

"No, indeed, Margie; but I forgot the keys. I will show you some to-morrow, however, and you can select for yourself."

And with a brief good-night, he departed.

"Margie, what a queer thing for you to say about Arthur's lameness," Mrs. Houghton remarked, chidingly, after he had gone. "And about his being tracked for crime!"

"Perhaps it was," she answered, indifferently, "but you know the old adage, mamma, 'idleness leads to crime.' Arthur Aspinwall is a very idle young man; whether he is above being led into anything worse, remains to be seen."

"I am afraid you are growing uncharitable, Margie."

"Perhaps I am, mamma," and Margaret vanished for the night, leaving Mrs. Houghton deeply perplexed over her very unaccountable manner that evening.

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

### WOMAN'S CURIOSITY.

The next day opened bright and beautiful, and everything seemed propitious for the grand *fête*.

Arthur Aspinwall, true to his promise, went at ten o'clock to conduct his friends to his uncle's apartments, which were delightfully situated on that grandest of all

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avenues in Paris, and where no better view of the procession could be found in the city.

Mrs. Houghton and Margaret were ready and waiting for him, but Mr. Houghton had been obliged to go to his office for a time, although he had promised to join them later—in season, he hoped, to see the procession pass.

Arthur had caused Mr. Forest's parlor, which was a very handsome room, to be profusely decorated with flowers, in honor of his guests, and ordered a tempting lunch to be served at one o'clock, while a sumptuous dinner was to be prepared for a later hour. He knew how to play the part of hospitable host handsomely, and without regard to the fact that some one else would have to pay the bills by and by.

He wheeled the easiest chairs into the large, roomy bay-window which overlooked the street, and after showing his friends through the suite, which consisted of parlor, two bedrooms, and bath-rooms, he seated them comfortably there to await the grand event of the day.

"You are to have the liberty of all these rooms," he informed them; "so do not feel obliged to confine yourselves to any one place, and by and by I will take you to the observatory at the top of the house, where you can get a bird's-eye view of Paris and the seven bridges of the Seine."

"This is a delightful window," Mrs. Houghton remarked, as she sank into her springy rocker and drew forth a dainty piece of fancy work with which to busy herself while waiting for the procession.

Margaret leaned back in her chair, folded her white hands upon her lap, and looked dreamily forth upon the street.

Arthur tried to draw her into conversation, but she did not seem inclined to talk, and after awhile he excused himself for a half-hour, and went out.

Margaret listened and heard him go down stairs; then, leaning forward, watched for him in the street below.

Presently he stepped out upon the sidewalk and passed at a brisk pace up toward the end of the avenue.

A moment or two later Margaret languidly arose.

"Mamma, I believe I will look about a little," she said.

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"I would, dear, if it will amuse you," Mrs. Houghton replied.

"There are several pretty pictures in the room," the young girl continued, moving toward one to examine it, and then glided noiselessly about, observing others and the various articles of bric-a-brac upon mantels, brackets, and table.

Mrs. Houghton was absorbed in her work and did not pay much attention to her daughter's movements, nor miss her, when at length she stole into the chamber beyond.

This room evidently belonged to Mr. Forest, for there was a huge chest in it, marked on one end with the initials "A. F."

There did not appear to be much to interest her here, and she passed on to Arthur's apartment.

A handsome bed stood in one corner; near it an elaborate dressing-case and a lounge. There was alsa a little, old-fashioned ebony table, with peculiarly carved legs and brass claw-feet. It had two small drawers in it, with brass rings for handles, while upon it there stood a large writing-desk.

Margaret's eyes lingered wistfully upon this, as if she would have been glad to know what it contained; but she passed on, and turned her attention to other objects.

There was a larger table standing in the center of the room, upon which there lay a few nice books and some ornaments, and near this there was a rocker and two or three willow chairs.

The walls were hung with some fine paintings and engravings, while upon the mantel there was an elegant clock, with vases to match.

She noticed a door at one end of the room. Approaching it, she stood before it a moment with thoughtful mien.

She put her hand upon the knob; then drew back.

"I feel like a contemptible spy," she murmured, the flush mounting to her temples. "The end justifies the means," she added, and boldly opened the door.

It led into a large closet, containing clothing, a chest of drawers, and a couple of trunks.

Margaret ran her eye quickly over every article of

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clothing hanging there; but nothing attracted her particularly.

She bent down and tried one of the trunks. It was locked.

She turned to the other. That also she was unable to open, but there was a bunch of keys hanging from the lock.

She hesitated; with the power in her hands, she yet shrank from prying into its contents.

She turned again to the other, which she had been unable to open, as if some peculiar influence attracted her to it.

Something caught her eye—a few white threads or raveling, she thought, that had been carelessly shut out when the lid was dropped.

She stooped to examine them, taking hold of them with her fingers. They proved to be white, silken hairs.

A low, startled cry escaped her, and she at once became greatly excited.

But the sound of voices in the parlor just then came to her ears.

Arthur had returned—was perhaps inquiring for her. In an instant later she had glided from the closet and shut the door.

She heard footsteps approaching, and the next moment Arthur appeared within the doorway leading to his chamber.

He found Margaret standing, fair and calm as the day, in front of the mantel, examining a picture that hung above it.

She turned at his approach.

"You told us we were at liberty to go where w liked, so I am improving my opportunity, you perceive," she said, with a smile, the first he had seen upon her face that day.

"I am very glad if there is anything to interest you here," he replied, going to her side.

"You have some fine pictures," she remarked, turning her attention again to the painting.

"This is one that I purchased of an artist who copies in the Louvre. Here is one"—leading her to a smaller one opposite—"that I purchased in Switzerland. It rep-

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resents the glaciers at Grindelwald. Doubtless you recognize it—and it is my favorite of the two."

"It is very fine. How plainly you can see the ice-grotto beneath the glacier. Your rooms are very pleasant, Arthur," she continued, glancing about brightly. "I believe that bachelors know how to make themselves as comfortable as other people. What a quaint, pretty table that is," she went on, pointing to the one of ebony before mentioned.

"Yes, it is; it belongs to the house, but I find it a very convenient little thing. It is so heavy and firm that it is very nice to write on, while the little drawers are just the thing for odds and ends which every one has and hardly knows what to do with."

He had apporached it while speaking, and opened one of the dawers in a careless, off-hand way.

It was divided into compartments, and contained a variety of articles tossed in at random.

"Why," Margaret exclaimed, "what do you do with so many keys?"

There was a dozen or more queer looking ones on a ring, besides several others of different patterns and sizes in one of the compartments.

Arthur flushed and looked confused for a moment. Then he said, with a constrained laugh:

"I had forgotten all about those keyes. I had a passion for such things when I was a boy, something as you have for coins and impressions. I imagine they must have been in my trunk when I left home, and I tumbled them in her with these other things."

"What peculiarly shaped ones these are," Margaret said, picking up the ring to examine them. "I never saw any like them before."

"Didn't you?" he merely said, though he looked annoyed.

"I have a few coins, also, you perceive," he added, picking up a number that lay in another compartment, and calling her attention to them.

"Ah, so you have," she returned, glancing indifferently at them; then her eyes wandered back to the drawer, as if seeking something special among the promiscuous assortment within it.

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"I have a mind to make a donation of these to your collection," Arthur continued. "Here is an old Roman coin that I found in a chink of a wall at Pompeii. I had to pocket it on the sly, however, for fear that the guide would see it, and take it away from me. Then here is a German penny of the sixteenth century, besides several others that have something of a history. Would you like them, Margie?"

"You are very kind," she replied, rather coldly, "but it would be selfish to take them when you have had the trouble of collecting them. I wish though, you would let me take the impression of some of these keys; you know you promised that I should make some selections to-day."

"Yes, and so you may; but these things do not amount to anything," he said, taking the ring from her. It contained a collection of skeleton keys, and he had no notion of allowing them to go into her possession.

"Here is one that is rather odd," he added, taking up one that lay loose in the drawer.

"So it is," she answered, as she examined it, "and that one in your writing-desk has a very peculiar thumb-piece."

"Yes, that is queer every way," Arthur replied, hastily closing the drawer and evidently glad to have her attention drawn elsewhere.

He took it from his desk and handed it to her to examine.

"I have another like it, only very much smaller," he went on. "It locks a little drawer inside the desk."

He threw up the lid as he spoke and she saw a tiny key in the lock of as tiny a drawer.

She saw something else, too, at the same instant—something that seemed to congeal her blood. The shock she experienced was caused by the sight of two other keys, common enough in themselves, but joined to each other by a bright, brass chain.

She laughed outright—a clear ringing laugh.

"What! more keys, Arthur?" she exclaimed, pointing to them, as soon as she could control herself sufficiently to speak. "Well, you must have a fancy for such things. Pray, what hidden treasures do these unlock?"

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"Oh!" he answered, hurriedly, while his eyes wavered and fell, "those belong to some closets at home, where all my boyish treasures are stored."

She knew that it was a lie, though she simply remarked:

"Ah! then, that accounts for the good care that you take of them in not allowing them to get mixed with that motely collection you have just shown me. But," changing the subject all at once, "what a lovely writing-desk you have here."

"Yes, it is one of the handsomest ones I ever saw; my father gave it to me the Christmas before I left home."

Margaret stood over it examining it for some time, remarking upon its many conveniences and the beauty of its furnishings; but she said not another word upon the subject of keys," and seemed to have forgotten their existence entirely.

"Well," she remarked, at last, turning away, "I wonder where that procession is; it must be nearly time for it."

She looked at her watch; it was half-past eleven.

"Yes, and I forgot entirely what I came to seek you for," Arthur answered, laughing, as he shut and locked his desk, but left the key in it.

"You see," he added, in a low, tender tone, "how you charm me, Margie. I remember nothing, when in your presence, but that I am with you."

Her golden head drooped suddenly; a scarlet wave leaped over her delicate throat and up to her snow-white brow, while her small hands, which were hanging by her side, were suddenly clinched with a force that sent a tremor through her whole frame.

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

### A CLEVER ARTIFICE.

"Come," he said, gently, "I have something for you in the parlor," and drawing her hand within his arm, he led her from his apartment back to her seat in the bay-window, little dreaming how that delicate hand longed to

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smite him to the floor, and tear from him the mask of hypocrisy.

Mrs. Houghton glanced up at their approach and smiled, saying to herself, what a handsome couple they made—he so dark and distinguished in appearance; she so fair and beautiful!

A small table had been wheeled up into the window before her, and upon it there was an elegant epergne of fruit and flowers, while beside it there lay some snowy napkins, three or four plates of delicate, painted china, and some silver knives.

Arthur unfolded a napkin and spread it upon Margaret's lap, then filling a plate with some of the finest fruit in the dish he passed it to her, at the same time dropping a superb spray of fuchsias into her hands.

He then waited upon Mrs. Houghton, after which he drew up another chair and helped himself, remarking that he was sorry that Mr. Houghton was not there to share with them.

Margaret quietly took up a banana and began to peel it, gazing absently out of the window meanwhile.

She made a pretense of tasting it, then dropped it upon her plate and assumed a listening attitude.

"Do I hear music?" she asked.

"Possibly," Arthur returned, looking at his watch, "yes," he added, "it is time for the procession, but I had no idea that it would be punctual."

Margaret set her plate upon the table, folded her napkin and laid it over the fruit; then arose and stood in the window.

Arthur looked disappointed; he had taken great pains in purchasing and arranging his dish of fruit.

Nearer and nearer the music came, rising and falling upon the clear air in melodious, inspiring strains.

"They are coming, mamma," said Margaret from her post of observation, and even Mrs. Houghton put aside her fruit now and arose to look.

The vanguard of the procession was just coming into sight at the head of the avenue, a brilliant array of cavaliers, clad in uniforms of scarlet and gold, and riding upon horses as gayly caparisoned.

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It was a grand sight and occupied nearly half an hour in passing a given point.

Margaret was very silent—scarcely speaking during the time, and Mrs. Houghton, seeing that she was in an unusual mood, threw herself into the gap and exerted herself to be as social and etertaining as possible with her young host.

Lunch was served, as soon as the procession moved on, in a small room opposite the parlor.

Mr. Houghton made his appearance then, having been unable to reach them before on account of the crowd, and his coming helped to make the little party more social and lively.

Margaret looked so flushed and seemed so preoccupied that her father feared she was ill and proposed an early return home. But this Margaret vetoed at once, and with an energy that made them both observe her more closely.

"Oh, no, do not let us go yet," she said, nervously; "it would not be polite to Arthur to run away directly after lunch, while you know he has promised to take us to the top of the building to get a view of the city, by and by; besides, if we go now, we shall be liable to get into a crowd, and that would be very disagreeable."

"But, Margie, dear, you know you have not rested at all to-day, and you usually lie down for an hour or so during the afternoon," her mother argued.

Mr. Houghton, watching his daughter, saw her eyes suddenly flash with a cunning, brilliant light.

"Well, it will not matter for once," she said, carelessly.

"Arthur, how many flights of stairs do we have to climb to reach the top of the building?" questioned Mrs. Houghton of her young host.

"Three."

The lady shot a rueful glance at her daughter.

"Margie, are you determined to do it?" she asked.

"Yes, mamma, if you please."

"Then upon one condition I will consent: That you lie down and rest for an hour first."

"Very well, mamma," Margaret murmured. Then turning suddenly to Arthur, she added, "if Arthur will

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kindly allow me to occupy his room, I will be obedient and do as you desire."

"Certainly," the young man cried, springing to his feet. "I will have the bed arranged in no time, and you shall rest as long as you like."

"No, no; do not do that. Just let me have a pillow, please, and I will lie down upon the lounge," she said, rising to obey her mother's wish.

Arthur, eager to perform any service for her, darted into his uncle's room, seized a pillow from his couch, and flew to deposit it upon the lounge in his room, and was back again in less than a minute.

"All is ready and at your service," he said, smiling and bowing before her. "Mrs. Houghton will you see that she is comfortable, and tell me if there is anything more that I can do?"

The two ladies retired, but, after a few moments, Mrs. Houghton reappeared alone, shutting the door leading into the room where she had left her daughter to rest.

To rest? As soon as the door had closed after her mother, Margaret sprang to her feet, clasped her hands convulsively together, raising them high above her head.

"How have I ever borne it?" she cried, in a shuddering whisper. "I believe I should have gone crazy in another hour."

She glided swiftly to the door and noiselessly turned the key in the lock. She then walked directly to Arthur Aspinwall's writing-desk and deliberately unlocked and opened it.

"I must have an impression of those keys before I do anything else," she murmured.

She drew a chair up to the table, sat down before the desk, and took from a compartment a piece of sealing-wax, and from another a tiny wax taper, which she lighted.

She heated one end of the wax until it melted, and dropped a small mass of it upon a piece of letter-paper; then she took those keys, which she was sure she had seen twice before, and gently pressed one of them upon the still warm wax.

It left a perfect impression, and she repeated the same operation with the other.

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"Now," she whispered, "I have something to work with; but—what will be the secret that I shall unlock?—oh, *what?*"

A shudder ran through her frame, and for a moment she seemed to grow dizzy and faint.

With an effort she aroused herself, carefully wrapped the wax impressions in some soft paper that she had in her pockets, and concealed them in her purse.

She extinguished the taper and pocketed that also, together with the burned match with which she had lighted the taper, that there might be nothing to betray the work of that hour. She then critically examined the keys to see that no particle of wax adhered to them.

She replaced them just where she had found them, closed and locked the desk, arose from her chair, and returned it to the very spot from which she had taken it.

Her next move was to glide like a spirit across the floor to Arthur's closet, which she entered, and unhesitatingly removing his keys from the trunk where they hung, tried them, one by one, in the lock of the other.

The last one that she inserted in the lock fitted. She turned it, holding her breath as she did so.

She lifted the lid, and a gasp of horror, mingled with a suppressed exclamation of satisfaction, told that she had found what she had expected and was looking for.

Inside that trunk, at one end, there lay folded a heavy overcoat of coarse, rough cloth.

At the other end, thrown in carelessly, and evidently hastily, there were a wig of white hair, a false beard, and a tall, old-fashioned, black silk hat.

"I knew it! I knew I should find them here!" Margaret breathed, with panting bosom, while her eyes were fastened in a horrified, fascinated gaze upon the disguise, which she could not fail to recognize.

Without making the slightest noise, she let down the lid of the trunk, relocked it, and replaced the bunch of keys in the other lock, where she had found them.

Then she went softly out of the closet, closing the door after her.

"Step by step I have traced this mystery thus far; step by step, and link by link, I will trace it to the end," she whispered, looking like some beautiful, avenging spirit.

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"I will ferret the whole truth out," she went on; "and I will do it *by myself!* Oh, Louis! Louis! *what* will that truth prove to be? Shall I ever have strength to accomplish it? Yes, I *will* have strength—I must know the truth!"

For a moment she stood in the center of the room, her hands clasped upon her breast, trying to still the fierce beating of her heart.

She had accomplished the purpose for which she had come that day; she had found, as she believed, some proof on which to ground the suspicions that had been growing during the last few weeks.

Becoming more composed, she stole to the door of the room and quietly unlocked it; then creeping feebly to the lounge, she sank, weary and almost exhausted, upon it, so thankful that she could rest now.

She looked at the clock upon the mantel.

She had not been twenty minutes in accomplishing what she had done.

"I will lie here for half an hour; then I shall be able to climb *six* flights of stairs, if necessary," she said, as a faint smile of triumph flitted over her wan face.

She closed her eyes, and in five minutes was fast asleep, her heart and mind relieved, but her body wearied out with the excitement of the day.

When Margaret awoke, she was much refreshed, and found that she had been asleep nearly an hour.

After re-arranging her hair, she returned to Mr. Forest's parlor. Her father and Arthur sprang forward to meet her.

"Your appearance indicates that your rest has done you good," said Mr. Houghton, noticing at once how much brighter she looked.

"Yes, indeed," she replied, passing Arthur unnoticed, and slipping her hand within her father's arm, "I believe I did need rest and quiet; and, I assure you, I have improved every moment of my time."

To what purpose she had improved it, not one of them dreamed.

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## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### IN THE RUE DE BLANC.

"Annette, can you keep a secret?"

"*Oui, oui, mademoiselle;* I betray never."

"You are *sure* that I may trust you?"

"*Ma foi; oui, mademoiselle.*"

"I have something very important, Annette, that I wish to consult you about, but if you should betray me, you would do me an irreparable injury."

"Mademoiselle has done me much kindness. I shall forget it never; try me, dear lady, my heart is yours," said the girl, earnestly, while tears sprang to her dark eyes and rolled over her cheeks, which, even yet, had not regained their usual rounded contour after her long illness.

"I believe I will try you, Annette," Margaret returned, gravely; "but first, are you very courageous, and have you strength to do something very disagreeable for me?"

"*Oui, mademoiselle;* I am strong, I am well; new life there is in me since the bad illness. A good heart, too—courage you call it—I will do anything for mademoiselle."

Margaret smiled, more at the girl's eager face and manner, than at her earnest words, which, however, had the ring of truth and real affection in them.

She had returned to her duties in the family nearly a week previous, and was, to all appearance, entirely recovered. She was very devoted, appearing to feel as if she could not do enough to show her appreciation of all the kindness she had received from Mrs. Houghton and her daughter during her illness.

It was three days since the *fête* and the Houghtons' visit to Arthur Aspinwall, and Margaret had been very busy during that time laying plans for future action.

The very next morning after the *fête* she had gone out by herself and ordered two keys to be made from the impressions that she had taken of those in Arthur's writing-desk.

To-day she had been out again to get them, and half

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the world's possessions would not have purchased those two precious bits of steel from her. She had already planned a bold course of action for the coming evening, if she could only secure Annette's co-operation.

"Does mademoiselle still fear to trust? Ah, no!" timidly pleaded the girl, after waiting several minutes for Margaret to go on, during which she had been carefully brushing the abundant hair which fell in waves of sunshine over the maiden's graceful shoulders.

Margaret started. She had fallen into a reverie and almost forgotten that she had spoken at all.

"No; I told you I would try you, Annette," she said, adding: "I want you to go out with me alone to-night."

"Alone, mademoiselle?"

"Yes."

"It is not etiquette for young ladies to go out in the evening unattended by a gentleman."

"We must ignore etiquette for once."

"Where will mademoiselle go?"

"To the Rue de Blanc."

"Rue de Blanc?" repeated the girl, astonished.

"Yes; but do not question me further now. I shall go with you to the door of your home and leave you there for a while; you will go in and make a little visit to your mother, and at the end of an hour you will come out again; you will find me waiting for you; or if you do not, wait a little for me. Now this is all that I can explain to you at present; if you do as I request, and say nothing, I shall reward you generously; but if you have not the courage or inclination to go with me, say so frankly, and forget that I have made the proposition."

"Is mademoiselle's heart set upon going to the Rue de Blanc this evening?" Annette questioned.

"It is absolutely necessary that I go."

"Then I will go also; and mademoiselle may trust me fully. I will not betray her."

"Thank you, Annette. I shall never forget it of you, if you stand by me faithfully in this. Attire yourself very plainly," Margaret continued, after a moment, "in dark clothing, just as soon as you have finished dressing mamma for Madame Dupre's reception, and then, when

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she and papa have gone, we will start out without letting any of the servants know that we are going."

"I will be ready," said Annette, and then, hearing her mistress' bell, she withdrew.

Margaret had also received an invitation to Madame Dupre's reception, but had framed some excuse for not attending. Still she urged her parents to accept, contending that for all three to absent themselves would be to give offense.

Shortly after eight o'clock Mr. and Mrs. Houghton left the house. Margaret accompanied them to the door, watched them get into the carriage and drive away, then hastened to her own room to prepare for her adventure.

Fifteen minutes later Annette entered her young mistress' room and found Margaret all ready and waiting for her.

She had arrayed herself in a simple dress of dark brown, with plain linen collar and cuffs; drawn her hair smoothly back from her forehead and put on a simple felt hat.

Her form was somewhat concealed by a dark cloth mantle, and there were a pair of coarse walking shoes on her small feet; in fact she had endeavored to make herself look as nearly like an humble servant as possible.

She was clad even more simply than Annette, but there was nevertheless an indescribable air about her that gave the lie to her disguise, while the beauty of her face alone shone forth even more prominent in contrast with her coarse apparel.

"Mademoiselle must wear a vail," said Annette, remarking it.

"I dislike a vail so much, Annette."

"But mademoiselle's face will surely betray her; there are no waiting maids in France with faces like that," and the girl pointed at the reflection of her figure in the glass near which they were standing.

Margaret glanced at herself and smiled slightly. Her face was like some rare pearl, and all the more conspicuous from its somber, almost ugly surroundings.

"The night is dark," she said, the thought of a vail still distasteful to her.

"*Oui,* but Paris is like a ball-room, with its thousands

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of lights. Mademoiselle will at least tie the vail about her hat, and she can draw it down or leave it up as she may have need," the maid persisted.

Margaret submitted to this arrangement, though she observed that she thought her companion was over particular.

"Pretty girls, unattended in the streets, should mask," Annette replied, sententiously.

"Now the gloves," she added, her cautious eyes remarking the young girl's delicate hands.

"I have them here; but stay. I have a pair of dark silk mittens—they will do even better."

"*Oui*—but the diamond—the beautiful ring! Take it off," said Annette, catching the flash of the brilliant stone.

"No, no!" Margaret cried, in a voice of pain, "I could not do that, and no one will see it with my hands covered," and she hastily drew on the mittens as she spoke.

The very thought of removing her ring, that precious pledge of love that Louis himself had put upon her finger, was like a knife in her heart.

With it still there she somewhat felt as if she was yet linked to him; to take it off would seem is if she was voluntarily separating herself from him.

"Now I am ready," she said, and the two girls stole softly out of the room, sped swiftly down stairs, and were soon in the street.

Here Margaret at once realized the wisdom of Annette's caution regarding the vail, for there were many people abroad, and the streets were almost as bright as day.

Annette chose by-streets as much as was possible, for she was very nervous and anxious upon her young mistress' account; she was only too conscious of the wickedness that lurks everywhere at night in gay but corrupt Paris.

But they went safely on their way, no one appearing to heed them, and at length turned into the Rue de Blanc.

"We are nearly there," the faithful girl whispered, as she came into the familiar locality. She had no fear now, because she was almost at home.

"Oh, how dark it is!" cried Margaret, under her breath,

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her heart beating like a frightened bird's, for there was only now and then a light to relieve the intense darkness, and the street was lonely and almost deserted.

"*Oui*, it is dark; mademoiselle is insane to come here at this hour."

"But I had to come, Annette—had to come. You are so good to come with me, Annette, I will tell you a little more. I have a suspicion—something that I must discover; no one else must know—I must find it out for myself. If there is nothing in it, no wrong will be done—no harm or injustice; but if what I believe prove true—if I succeed, then justice shall fall where it is merited."

Margaret spoke in a low, excited tone, and her companion could feel that she was trembling in every limb.

"Is it—the suspicion—connected with the—unfortunate monsieur?" she asked, gently.

"Yes," and a sob accompanied the assent.

"Ah! But tell me—I will do anything for you, mademoiselle—what has it to do with this lonely, wretched street."

"It was here that I discovered something, one day, while you were sick." Margaret explained, craving sympathy, now that the supreme hour of her trial had come.

"*Oui, oui;* I begin to comprehend!" cried the girl, with animation. "The buildings here are empty, deserted; no one comes to them only to store or hide something. Mademoiselle is keen. But how will she enter?"

"I have keys to one of them."

"How will she see?"

"I have a candle and matches."

"Mademoiselle will be careful about fire?" said Annette, anxiously.

"Oh, yes. But this is the place where I must go," Margaret said, stopping as they drew near the alley before mentioned; "it is very near your home. Go, Annette, and make your call. Do not say or do anything to arouse the suspicion of any one. Stay one hour, then come out, and I will meet you here."

"Mademoiselle, I shall go with you," the girl asserted, in a voice of decision. "I dare not let you go into that dark, dreadful place alone."

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Margaret hesitated a moment. The temptation to take her, both for company and protection, was very strong, almost irresistible, for it was a terrible undertaking—a fearful ordeal for a delicate girl like her to face alone.

But she did not know just how far she could trust Annette, notwithstanding her protestations of gratitude and fidelity.

"No, Annette," she replied to the girl's entreaty; "I think it will be better for me to go my myself. Now, adieu, and be very guarded in what you do and say."

Annette hesitatingly obeyed, and crossed the street, calling on the saints to watch over her young mistress and guard her from all danger.

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## CHAPTER XXIX.

### IN THE LONELY HOUSE.

Left alone, Margaret quietly slipped into the alley. She glided on noiselessly to that third door, mounted the steps and stood within the narrow porch.

She drew forth her keys.

"What if they should not fit, after all," was the sudden doubt that assailed her.

She drew off the mitten from her right hand and thrust it into her pocket; then feeling with her trembling fingers for the keyhole, she inserted the largest key in it, reasoning that that one would most probably unlock the outer door.

Breathlessly she attempted to turn it; oh, how much depended upon that little piece of steel. It was a supreme moment.

But joy, it moved! The bolt slid back without a sound, and she knew that it must have been well oiled by some one who had been there before her.

It was then the work of but a moment to turn the handle, open the door, step inside, and close it again behind her.

She had not made the slightest sound in so doing, which convinced her that the hinges had been well oiled also.

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She did not relock it; she had not courage enough to do that and fasten herself away from all the world with she knew not what; besides, she had told Annette to search for her there if she did not return in an hour.

An involuntary shiver passed over her as she found herself in that blackness of darkness, an uncanny dampness in the atmosphere, a close, moldly smell greeting her nostrils, and for a moment she was helf-tempted to open the door again and fly from the weird place.

But she resolutely conquered the feeling; she would never relinquish her purpose after pursuing it thus far.

She listened intently for an instant, but not a sound was to be heard anywhere in the building.

She produced a wax candle and matches and struck a light, carefully returning the burnt match to her pocket afterward; there must be no evidence of any kind to betray her visit there.

Shading her candle with her mantel, so as to conceal the light as much as possible, she looked about her.

She found herself in quite a large room—its walls and ceiling covered with dust, mold, and cobwebs—having two windows looking out into the alley from which she had just entered.

There was no other door in the room excepting the outer one, but in the rear of it there was a flight of stairs leading into the next story.

With noiseless tread Margaret crossed the floor and ascended these.

At the top there was a narrow landing, and beyond, a door partially open.

She crossed the landing, pushed the door wide open, and found herself in a small room, bare and empty, and having only one small window, set rather high in the wall.

Dust lay thick on the floor here also, but there were numerous traces of footsteps all about, showing that some one had been in the habit of coming and going very recently.

The walls were covered with a paper that had once

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been handsome, but was now falling off in places, and badly defaced with age and mildew.

On her left, as she entered, there was another door.

This was shut.

She put forth her hand to open it, but a strange feeling came over her and made her pause in the act, while her heart began to beat almost audibly.

Something seemed to tell her that beyond that door she would make a discovery—that she had reached the end of her journey, and that some tangible clew to the mystery in which she was so deeply interested would lay within her reach when she should pass that threshold.

She summoned all her courage, grasped the door knob and turned it.

The door resisted her effort—it was locked.

A momentary feeling of dismay was dispelled by remembering that she had another key.

Softly, as if fearing that some one would overhear her, though not a sound, save what she had made herself, had she heard since entering the building, she inserted the key in the lock and turned it.

How well her keys had been made! She had found no difficulty whatever in using them, and this lock, also, slid back with perfect ease.

But even now she hesitated. Her success, thus far, almost awed her. She had followed Arthur Aspinwall to his lair, as every step she had taken went to prove.

Now it only remained to be seen what it contained.

Perhaps it was only a place which he had hired to store some purchases that he had made during his travels abroad, until he should be ready to go home; perhaps, after all, she would find nothing but common trunks, or cases and boxes.

But, no; she felt sure that could not be all, else he would not have deemed it necessary to assume a disguise in going and coming to and from the place.

Suddenly she remembered that ring of queer looking keys that she had seen in the drawer of the little ebony table in his room. She had heard of skeleton keys, but she had never seen any; now she felt sure that they were such.

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How ill at ease he had been when she took them up to examine them! How he had evaded her questions and tried to deceive her regarding them!

Ah! he was a rogue, deeply dyed! She believed that he was a thief and a robber! He did not have such cunning implements in his possession for nothing; they were used for entering places where valuables were deposited, and doubtless this room before which she now stood was the repository of his ill-gotten gains; and joy! she believed she should find there that gold which, she became more and more confident, he and no other had taken from the safe of Louis Dunbar's office.

She had been told that the alley led through to the Rue Castiglione, where the office was; how easy to bring his spoils thither, and then from time to time come to help himself from them as he had need, while no one would suspect the bold thief in that disguise of the modest old gentleman.

Her courage revived, her nerves grew more calm; the beating of her heart became more regular and natural, and with more of confidence than she had yet experienced since coming forth upon her errand, she again put forth her hand to open that door.

In the act she dropped her candle upon the floor.

The sound startled her almost as much as the sudden firing of a heavy cannon would have done, for it awakened all the echoes within that empty building, and to her sensitive ears it seemed as if a thousand wicked elves and sprites were laughing and mocking at her fears.

Fortunately, the light was not extinguished, and she had not the added terror of being in darkness, and stooping, she recovered it almost immediately.

But, heavens! what was that other sound?

Her heart sprang to her throat, then fell like a dead weight in her bosom, while she stood absolutely paralyzed with fear, and feeling as if every drop of blood in her body had become congealed.

It seemed as if a ton's weight had suddenly fallen somewhere in the building, or, horrible thought, perhaps some one had entered below, and finding the place un-

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locked and its treasures endangered; had, in his fear and haste, swung to the door with a loud bang, and thus she would have to face an unforseen danger.

But no; on second thought it could not have been the shutting of a door—the sound had been too muffled for that.

What was it?

She stood and listened, never moving, scarcely breathing, her pale face looking like a mask of molded wax beneath her dark hat and somber vail.

There was no sound of footsteps below or on the stairs; nothing was stirring anywhere, and she was convinced that no one had followed her. There was no movement within the room she was about to enter, so she reasoned the sound could not come from there. She at length decided that some heavy substance must have fallen somewhere near—perhaps in the building adjoining.

Her terror and excitement began to abate, and once more she began to breathe freely.

The door before her was unlocked; a single movement, and she could know what was within.

To her astonishment, she saw a dim light inside the room, as from a gas-jet turned low.

There was an old and faded carpet upon the floor. To the left there was another door, but this was bolted both at the top and bottom, while nearly opposite where she was standing was a window, but it was guarded by heavy shutters.

There was a death-like stillness everywhere; but what did that dimly burning light mean?

She opened the door a little farther. Still no movement.

Now she could see more of the room, though not the whole, and there seemed to be something like a fence or iron grating reaching from floor to ceiling, that partitioned off a portion of the room, and inside this she could just see what looked like the side of a huge iron safe.

The sight of this excited her curiosity, while she

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had no idea that the safe might contain the treasure she was seeking.

Forgetting all else now in her eagerness, she boldly swung the door wide open and stepped into the room.

As she did so, there resounded through it a cry which she never forgot.

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## CHAPTER XXX.

### THE IRON CAGE.

At that fearful sound, the candle that Margaret carried dropped a second time from her nerveless fingers, and was extinguished as it fell. She staggered weakly against the wall, and stared blankly before her with failing senses.

When she had swung that door wide open, the whole of the room was revealed to her, and she saw that one corner was inclosed by a sort of iron fence like a cage, perhaps to protect the safe before mentioned.

But standing within this inclosure, his white face pressed close against the iron bars, *there was a man!*

His dark eyes had a wild, anxious look in them, and he scarcely seemed to breathe, so eagerly had he been watching for the appearance of the person whom he had heard without. His hair was long and disheveled, his face haggard and worn, his linen soiled and rumpled, and his whole appearance denoting neglect.

As that door had been slowly opened, he had stood breathless, immovable; then, as Margaret's face and form came into sight he had thrown up his hands and uttered the startled cry which had so unnerved the young girl.

Standing there and looking before her, it seemed for a while as if she were dying. There was a roaring in her ears, her sight failed her, and she felt as if all life and sense were slipping away from her.

Then she suddenly heard, as if in a dream, yet strangely real and life-like, an earnest, thrilling voice calling:

"Margaret! Margaret! you must not faint—do you

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hear me? Rouse yourself, my darling; listen—listen!"

She raised her failing eyes with a helpless look. She saw that figure in the dim light, with its arms outstretched, his manner so eager, almost frenzied, and recognized it, while a wan smile flitted over her colorless lips; still she could not move from the spot where she stood.

It was her lover—she knew him. It was Louis Dunbar in the flesh.

Still she could only see him dimly—there seemed a vail between him and her. She only heard his voice faintly—the sound seemed far away.

Then all at once her limbs failed her; she sank upon her knees to the floor, and her head dropped upon a chair that stood near.

She knew that she was faint and almost unconscious, yet she tried all the force of her will to rally her failing energies in obedience to his eager call.

"Margie, my white lily, rouse yourself," he pleaded. "Do you not see that I am a prisoner—that I am locked in behind these cruel bars? If you faint, I cannot get to you to do anything for you. For Heaven's sake, and the love you bear me, call back, your strength and come to me."

Ah, yes, she would, she must; she would not faint, for so much depended upon her! If she should lie there unconscious, the hour she had allowed herself would go by, Annette would come for her, and not finding her, would doubtless create a terrible excitement looking for her.

But—oh, it seemed almost beyond her power to do anything to break the spell that was upon her—she was so benumbed, so utterly strengthless.

She exerted herself, and wearily raised her head from the chair. She remembered to have heard that rubbing was good for restoring the circulation, and she began feebly to chafe her hands and arms.

Even the effort helped her; she began to breathe more freely, that terrible sound in her ears grew less, and she could see more distinctly.

That loved voice did not sound quite so far away, for

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Louis kept talking to her, encouraging her to persist in her efforts, though bemoaning the cruel fate that kept him from her.

Every moment she was improving; now she could see him quite plainly, and she lifted her face to him and smiled upon him.

The sight of that sweet, fond smile unnerved him, and, strong man though he was, he leaned his head against the iron bars and a great sob escaped him.

That did more for her than all else.

Her heart gave a bound that set all her pulses beating once more, and sent the blood coursing naturally in its channels.

"Louis—Louis!" she murmured.

"Yes, my darling, it is I. Oh, this dreadful cage!" he cried, almost frantically, and, grasping the bars with his hands, he shook it desperately.

It was useless, however; he could barely stir it.

"Did you think some terrible thing had happened to me?" he went on. "Did you believe that I was dead? Ah, I can hardly credit the evidence of my senses—I can hardly realize that it is really you whom I see, and not a delusion of my own brain. How did you get here, Margaret? What Providence directed your footsteps hither, and how dared you come alone at such an hour? Oh, dearest, have you not strength to come to me? Come and sit in this chair close beside me, and let me put my hands between these bars and take yours. I will warm them; I will chafe them for you, and that will impart new strength to you."

Margaret helped herself to her feet by the aid of the chair beside her, and tottered to the one he had indicated, and sank wearily into it.

Louis threw himself upon his knees, thrust his hands forth from his cage, and, grasping hers, began to rub them as vigorously as circumstances would permit.

"These dear hands! how icy cold they are!" he said, tenderly, "and how I have longed for a touch of them during these endless weeks! Ah, I cannot understand at all, how *you*, of all people, should come to me in this ex-

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tremity. Are you better, dear? But wait—how stupid of me!—I have some water here."

He darted to a tiny table, on which there stood a pitcher and glass, also a plate containing some bread and meat.

He poured out some water, and brought it to her.

"Drink, dear," he said; "then bathe your face and head with it."

She obeyed him and was immediately refreshed; there was even a promise of color in her hitherto colorless lips.

"This is just what I needed," she said, returning the glass to him and looking up at him with her old, fond smile.

"Oh, Louis, *is* it really you," she added, in a trembling voice, "how can I bear the joy of it?"

She could say no more, but, dropping her face upon her hands, sobbed liked a child.

He put forth his hand again and laid it tenderly on her bowed head.

"My poor darling," he murmured, "what a hard trial this must have been for you."

Margaret raised her head and dashed the tears from her lashes.

"I can never tell you how hard," she said, then asked: "But, Louis, have you the time with you?"

"Yes; the wretch had the grace to leave me my watch," he replied, drawing it forth.

"Who? Arthur Aspinwall?"

"Yes. How came you to suspect him?"

"You shall know by and by—but the time, please?"

"Twenty minutes past eight."

"Ah! I have only a half-hour, then, for it must have been nearly eight when I reached here; but the first thing to consider is how to get you out of this place," Margaret returned, while she viewed the strong bars between them, with dismay.

"If you have a key to fit that padlock on the corner I can be free in less than two minutes," Louis answered, directing her attention to the fastening.

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"I have not, unless the keys that unlocked the doors of that building will do it."

She went to get them, having left them in the door, but he knew instantly that they would be of no use.

"No, neither of them will fit," he said, gloomily.

"What shall we do, then?" she asked, growing pale, and looking deeply distressed, for she could well see there was no other way of getting out except that of unlocking the gate.

Each of those massive bars extended from the floor to ceiling, into which they were embedded, while a strong band of iron braced them about midway.

Louis thought a few moments, then said:

"We can do nothing to-night, dear, that is very evident; I must remain here at least another day, or until you can bring me the means of release."

"But I can go and tell papa, he will notify the police, and you can thus be liberated immediately," Margaret said, eagerly.

Again her lover was silent for several moments.

"No, dear," he at length returned, "I have reasons for thinking that such a proceeding would not be best. I will not stop to tell you how I happen to be confined here; there will not be time for that if you must go in half an hour; but, of course, you know that when I disappeared, a large amount of money also disappeared with me."

"Yes."

"What does the world believe about it? Do people think that I absconded with it?" Louis anxiously asked.

"Some do," Margaret was forced to admit, "but those who knew you best believe that there was foul play, and that your father had some hand in it."

"The foulest in the world, though they are mistaken as to its author," Louis said, his face growing dark and stern. "But never mind that now," he went on; "what I wanted to tell you was I believe that money is concealed somewhere in this building."

"In the safe?" interrupted Margaret, eagerly.

"Oh, no; it never would have done to have put it inside this coop with me; the wretch was too cunning

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for that, for he could not get at it without coming in contact with me. But I am confident, from his movements, when he comes here, that it is not very far off, and Margaret, if people believe that I have been the thief, I can never show my face until I am able to restore it to the company."

"But perhaps you never can do that," said the young girl, anxiously.

"I *must*, the money was in my keeping. I am responsible for it," Louis said, with decision.

"Let me go for papa," Margaret pleaded; "he can at least have Arthur arrested, and he could be made to confess the whole plot."

"I am afraid that cannot be easily done, for he is made of pretty resolute stuff, as I can truthfully bear witness. I have an idea, however, that by using a little strategy I can accomplish what I wish, and when I appear in the world again I can restore the treasure that was in my keeping."

Margaret looked greatly distressed.

"Louis, I cannot bear the thought of your remaining here another hour; you have suffered enough already—you are very thin and haggard," she said, gazing wistfully into his face.

"I know it, dear," he returned, smiling; but I am no longer destitute of hope, and I shall soon build up again. Now listen to what I have to propose, for much still depends upon you. The first thing I have to do is to get outside of this wretched cage."

"Yes, but how?" Margaret asked.

"It will be comparatively easy now," he answered; "you have keys to the doors of this building, and can come and go at your pleasure."

"Yes."

"I am crazy to know how you obtained them—but never mind that now. I am going to tell you, though," he said, smiling, "to go home like a good girl, and sleep to-night the sleep of the just. To-morrow go to some hardware shop and purchase a thin file and saw suitable for cutting iron; and to-morrow evening at this time, bring them to me, together with some black beeswax."

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"Oh, you are going to cut out some of those bars!" said Margaret, beginning to comprehend his plan.

"Yes; and as it may take some time to do it, I shall need the wax to hold them in place until I have room enough to get out, so as to avoid suspicion of my scheme if Aspinwall should come in upon me before I am through. Once give me an outlet from this place, and I can take my own time to search for the money. You shall come to me every day to cheer me with the sight of your dear face, and to learn how I am progressing. Let me once discover where that treasure is concealed, then you shall notify Mr. Houghton; he can inform the police, who will of course immediately arrest Aspinwall, and my vindication will be complete. On the other hand, if he should have the slightest suspicion that my place of concealment had been discovered, he would decamp with his ill-gotten gains before any one could move in the matter, and those forty thousand dollars would be lost forever.

"I have expected that he would adopt extreme measures before this. I am confident, however, that he does not want to stain his hand with blood; he doubtless hopes to find some other way of disposing of me, but I believe he will let well enough alone for the present. No one, he believes, suspects that I am here; no one has any idea that he had anything to do with the robbery, so until he begins to think of leaving Paris, I believe he will keep me a prisoner in this place. One thing, however, puzzles me," Louis continued, looking perplexed, "and that is how he came to know that there was such a large sum of money in my safe. No one besides myself and the cashier knew anything about it until I mentioned to it you that evening."

"That was how he discovered it," Margaret said, eagerly; and then she gave her reasons for believing that Arthur was concealed behind the curtains in the parlor on the night of his disappearance.

"It wasn't the money alone that made him follow me, I am sure," Louis replied, when she concluded; "it was a deeper scheme than that."

"Do you think so?"

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"Yes, Margaret, he has loved you for years, and he has been my mortal foe ever since he knew that we loved each other. Of course, he heard all our plans that night, and it must have made him desperate, while my speaking of the money gave him the very opportunity he desired. He meant to make it appear that I had absconded with it, thus getting rid of me, disgracing me forever in your sight and the world's, and giving him a chance to win you for himself by and by."

"I think so, too," Margaret replied, though a bright flush stained her cheek at the acknowledgment, "and I fear such a belief would have prevailed—that is, that you had taken the money and fled—if papa had not explained to the detectives that you could have no object in so doing, since we were engaged, and it would ruin all our prospects, and you would forfeit more than treble the amount by such an act. Consequently they settled upon that other theory—that your father had something to do with it, and there had been foul play."

"They have been diligently looking for him, I suppose?" Louis asked.

"Yes; but as they are without a description of him, it is not strange that they have failed to find him."

"I imagine he is frightened, and keeps himself securely concealed," said Louis. "I only hope he has taken my advice and returned to America. It was a bold and cunning scheme, though, on the part of Aspinwall."

"Tell me about it, Louis," Margaret pleaded.

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## CHAPTER XXXI.

### HOW THE DEED WAS DONE.

Louis looked at his watch again.

There were a little more than ten minutes before her hour would expire—time enough for a brief outline of the occurrences of that eventful night, he thought.

"When I left you," he began, "I hastened toward my office, as I told you I intended to do, but I had not a thought of being followed, nor that any one could suspect whither I was bound. I reached it, unlocked the

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outer door and passed into the building. I did not relock the door on the inside, because I did not intend to remain more than a moment or two, just long enough to assure myself that everything was all right. That was a mistake, and fatal to me. I should have locked it at once upon entering.

"The building was of course very dark. I could see nothing, but I knew every step, and passed across the vestibule to my own office door. As I was inserting the key in its lock I thought I heard a slight noise behind me. I paused to listen, and was sure I heard some one trying to repress labored breathing. The next instant I felt a stunning blow on the back of my head, and fell to the floor senseless.

"When I came to myself again, I was bound hand and foot, a gag in my mouth, and a handkerchief tied tightly over it. My office door was open, and I saw Aspinwall down on his knees before the safe. He had robbed me of my keys, entered the office, opened the safe, and was in the act of taking the money from it by the light of a taper match, which went out while I looked. Presently he came out, shutting and locking the office door after him.

"He bent over me and listened. I thought best to feign unconsciousness still, thinking perhaps he might not be quite so much on his guard if he believed I had not recovered my senses, and I could thus learn more about his movements. So I held my breath and did not stir. After a moment he passed me and went out at the street door, locking that also after him.

"I do not know how long I lay there, but it seemed an age, and I was nearly wild about the money. I could not move, being so securely bound, and I believed that I must lay there until some one discovered me in the morning. However, I thought that would not be the worst that could happen to me, for as long as I was not seriously injured, I should be able to set the officers at once on the track of the audacious robber. But these plans were defeated by the return of my assailant. He entered the second time, securely locking the door after him. Then I heard him strike a match, a candle was

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lighted, and an old man with white hair and beard bent over me and scanned my countenance.

"Oho! so you've come to!" he said, in a low, assumed voice.

He stooped and removed the cord from my feet, carefully winding it into a ball and storing it away in a capacious pocket of his long great-coat, so as to leave no traces behind him.

"'Get up!' he then commanded.

"I struggled to my feet and looked him over. I knew well enough that it was Aspinwall in disguise; but I could not speak, for that gag and bandage had been very thoroughly arranged. Just then, away in the distance, I heard one of the city clocks strike three. My heart sank with me, for I knew there would be little hope of my obtaining assistance at that hour. The pseudo old man took me by the arm and led me to the door, where he extinguished his candle. Then he cautiously looked forth into the street.

"Everything was quiet. He led me out, and still keeping firm hold upon me, carefully locked the door after us. He then cocked a pistol and placed it against my breast.

"'If you make any resistance or disturbance, I will make short work of you,' he said, in a low, determined voice.

"Our office, as perhaps you know, is on the corner of this alley, which leads through from Rue de Castiglione to Rue de Blanc. He turned immediately into it and brought me straight to this building, which was unlocked and evidently ready for my reception.

"Entering, he lighted his candle again, and pointing to the stairs, bade me mount them. I could only obey, for I was helpless to do otherwise, and he followed me, forcing me into this room, which was dimly lighted and arranged as you see it now. The gate to this cage was open. He commanded me to enter. I stopped and faced him, while I struggled frantically to free my hands, which were bound behind my back. I could not resign myself to such a fate without an effort to escape. But, of course, it was useless, and taking me rudely by the

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shoulder, he pushed me inside, when he closed and locked the gate upon me.

"'Now,' he said, 'turn your back to me and I will give you the use of your hands.'

"I obeyed, backing close up to the bars, and he cut the cord that bound them.

"Had I been outside and close beside him, with weapons of defense within my reach, I could not have used them, for my hands were so numb and weak that they were absolutely powerless. I could not even raise them to untie the bandage from my mouth, and had to motion to him to do it for me, which he did.

"Then I faced him.

"'What does this mean, and what do you expect to gain by this night's work?' I demanded.

"'Softly, my friend, if you please; it affects my nerves unpleasantly to have any one speak in such a tone,' he said, in a mocking though still disguised voice.

"'Arthur Aspinwall,' I retorted, 'you may as well drop your mask, for I know you and no amount of pretension can conceal your identity from me.'

"He started, and looked at me keenly.

"'My name, young man, is Pierre Dupont; I know not your Arthur Aspinwall,' he said, in French, and in the same voice as before.

"'That is a very useless and senseless story,' I replied, 'for I saw your face when you took that money from the safe in my office a few hours ago.'

"'Very well,' he then answered, in his natural tone, though his face had grown ghastly white upon learning that he was discovered.

"'What do you expect to gain by this night's work?' I repeated.

"'That remains to be seen,' he replied. 'But you can doubtless understand that it will be necessary for me to detain you for a time, until the excitement which must prevail after the discovery of to-night's event subsides somewhat. I shall endeavor, however, to make you as comfortable as circumstances will permit. You will see that I have provided you with a lounge upon which to sleep, while on that table there is food, which will be

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renewed every day or two. Your quarters, I acknowledge, are rather cramped, but they have the advantage of being secure; and, let me assure you, it will be utterly useless for you to attempt to escape. If you cry out to the top of your lungs, no one will hear you, as this room is the same as a room within a room, for beyond those windows there is a corridor leading into the street below, and all these buildings for some way down the alley are empty. This was originally the shop of a diamond-worker, which accounts for the very secure way in which that safe is guarded; and you need not fear the intrusion of any one upon your privacy. Now, as the night has been rather a busy one for me, I will leave you and go to get some rest. I will, however, look in upon you tomorrow, and shall hope to find you in a tranquil state of mind.'

"'Stay!' I said as he was about to leave me. 'How far do you intend to carry this state of affairs? Do you imagine that you can hide me for any length of time from my friends?'

"He gave me a wicked look.

"'I do not *imagine* anything, Louis Dunbar—I *know* that I have covered my tracks so effectually that no one will ever suspect that I had anything whatever to do with your sudden disappearance. The only possible explanation of the mystery will be that you yourself absconded with the gold committed to your trust.'

"With those terrible words he left me, and you can perhaps imagine the frame of mind I was in. You say that I have 'suffered,' that I have grown 'thin'; truly I have, Margaret, and for those next three days I endured the torments of the Inquisition. I could see how well Aspinwall had managed to conceal his identity, and that no one would suspect him of having had any hand in the robbery of my office; but how he had ever gained a knowledge of the money was the most tantalizing mystery of all. You have, however, made that plain to me. Of course, he must have concealed himself behind those draperies, and, leaving the house almost immediately after I had done so, followed me all the way to the office.

"There, dear, your time is very nearly up," Louis said,

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holding his watch so that she could see for herself, "and I must tell you no more now."

"Must I go and leave you! Oh Louis! it seems as if I could not," Margaret said, with a regretful sigh.

"It is the best plan, for the reasons I have already stated. You will bring me those tools to-morrow, and then, in a few hours, I shall have my fate in my own hands. Now you must not stay another minute. Give me your candle, and let me light it from mine."

Margaret stooped to get it for him, and, as she did so, removed some drops of wax that had adhered to the carpet when it fell. She would not leave the slightest trace of her movements that night. Arthur Aspinwall must not be allowed to suspect at present that his prisoner had been discovered.

Louis lighted the candle, but bent and kissed the hand that she put out to receive it before giving it to her.

"Heaven bless my brave and faithful love, and grant that no harm may befall her!" he said, tenderly, adding: "I shall count the hours until we meet again."

Margaret smiled a fond response, and, with a last good-night, passed out of the room.

She carefully locked the door after her, and then passed down the long flight of stairs, taking the precaution to hold her clothing away from them, so that they would leave no trace behind to betray that a woman had been there.

Reaching the lower room, she extinguished her candle, put it into her pocket, opened the outer door, and listened.

There was not a sound anywhere near.

She passed out, turning the key quietly, quickly sped down the steps and out into the street.

Annette stood there at the corner, waiting for her.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### AN UNPLEASANT ADVENTURE.

"Holy Mother be praised, mademoiselle! I have suffered the torments of purgatory for you!" the girl cried, as Margaret joined her. "Did mademoiselle accomplish what she wished to-night?"

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"Not fully. It will at least take one visit more. Are you brave enough to come with me again, Annette?"

"*Oui;* if mademoiselle *must* come again, I shall come with her", was the unhesitating response.

"Thanks! and now I will tell you this much, Annette—if I succeed in my plans, without creating suspicion before they are accomplished, I shall once more be the happiest girl in all Paris."

"*Mon Dieu!* then monsieur must be safe—nothing else could make mademoiselle happy," returned the girl, shrewdly.

Margaret laughed softly—such a sweet, silver laugh, and a sound that had long been a stranger to her lips; but her sorrow had flown, and hope was once more beating high within her heart.

They had just come out from Rue de Blanc to the broader, better lighted, and more frequented street beyond, and were about to cross it, when that sweet, happy laugh of Margaret's attracted the attention of two individuals who were crossing from the opposite side.

Margaret thinking only of her joy and success, had forgotten to draw down her vail, and her beautiful face, all lighted with hope and love, was exposed to the gaze of all whom she met.

One of the men turned back after passing the girls.

"Ah! those were dulcet tones for a grisette! and, *mon Dieu!* what a face! Look—'tis the sweetest in the world!"

Margaret's heart sank with sudden terror, for she had caught every word.

She hastily pulled down her vail, and grasping Annette's arm almost convulsively, excitedly increased her pace.

But she soon became conscious that they were being followed, for the two men had turned back and were walking behind them.

They increased their speed, and those other footsteps grew more rapid also.

"What shall we do, Annette?" whispered Margaret, in a trembling voice.

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"Take no notice—maybe they will pass and go on," was the low reply.

But their pursuers did not pass on; they kept a little in the rear, talking in ominously subdued tones.

"In a moment we shall turn into a side street and pass to the Rue de Rivoli, where we need not fear; for there are many people there," said Annette in a reassuring tone.

But the moment they turned she saw her mistake; they should have kept on in the better lighted, more frequented way, or gone to a corner, taken a fiacre, and driven home; for the two men followed close upon them.

The street was a comparatively short one, but very quiet, and there was but little passing in it at that hour of the evening.

The girls had accomplished only half the distance, when one of their pursuers stepped up to Margaret's side and boldly addressed her:

"Ah, pretty one, you should not be out unattended on a night so dark. Paris is not a safe place. Come, we will shield you—we will conduct you to your home."

The tone was familiar, and even insulting, and Margaret was so alarmed that she could hardly force her trembling feet along.

"Go away and leave us alone," sharply commanded Annette.

"Nay, nay; surely those are not the flute-like tones that greeted my ears but a moment ago!" retorted their persecutor, in a bantering tone.

"Come, come, my good girls," he continued, coaxingly, "make friends with us; there is a fine *cafe* yonder; let us repair thither, and pass an hour in mirth and good-fellowship. Indeed I *must* see this pretty one's face once more," and he laid his hand familiarly upon Margaret's arm as he spoke.

She instantly shook it off and drew her form haughtily erect.

"Ha, ha!" laughed the man beside her, "what an air! Have we here some beautiful countess in disguise? Ah! but I am tempted beyond all reason. Here we are at the *cafe*. Quick, Antoine! quick!"

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He had kept pace with the frightened girls, while his companion passed on and was walking just before them.

As he uttered these last words, he grasped Margaret firmly by the arm; the man before them sprang forward and suddenly opened a door of the building which they were passing, and the powerless maidens were hurried into a brilliantly lighted passage, and the door was quickly closed and locked behind them, almost before they were aware of the intention of their enforced companions.

Another door was opened, and they were conducted into a large and handsomely furnished room.

Rich rugs lay about the highly polished, inlaid floor; a glittering chandelier was suspended from the exquisitely frescoed ceiling; beautiful draperies were at the windows; there was a magnificent piano in one corner of the room, and elegantly upholstered furniture was scattered invitingly about the apartment.

At a center-table, upon which there was a profusion of books and periodicals, there sat a fine-looking young man of perhaps twenty-five years, sipping a glass of wine, and engaged in reading.

He looked up as the party from the street entered.

"Ah! bah! what are you up to now, Perrine?" he asked, in an impatient tone, and regarding the two trembling girls with astonishment.

"Only a little lark, Lorrain. We have found two pretty girls who are over modest, but we are determined to make their acquaintance."

Margaret stood panting with fear and exhaustion, holding her vail closely over her face and trembling in every limb, for she had now recognized both the man who had insulted her and the gentleman who was sitting at the table.

The former was a frequenter of places of amusement, and she had met him often. She had never been prepossessed in his favor; still she had imagined him to be of a respectable family, or he would not have been received in those select circles.

The latter was the Count Lorrain, a youthful nobleman, highly respected and much sought after in culti-

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vated society, and Margaret had often chatted and danced with him at balls and parties; indeed, he had shown her much marked attention, so much that her father had once said, in a laughing way, that he "did not see anything to prevent her becoming a countess *if* she chose."

What should she do—appeal to him and demand his protection against her persecutor?

She knew that she had but to speak the word, and he would spring to her assistance at once; but the thought of having her identity discovered was torture to her, while he would doubtless think it very strange that she should be walking the streets of Paris with her maid, and in such a guise, at that hour of the night; while, of course, it would be utterly impossible for her to explain her errand to him.

She resolved, however, not to unvail her face, if she could avoid it; she knew that she was in a perilous position, but that would be the last resort.

Annette was crying and wringing her hands, and pleading to be released.

"Ah, monsieur," she sobbed, "pray let us go. We are only two waiting maids. We have been to visit our mother, and were quietly returning to our mistress when you assailed us. Ah, good monsieur," turning to Count Lorrain, "you are kind; you will plead for us; you will not let them insult two unprotected girls. Pray—pray, monsieur, make them let us go."

The count looked displeased and annoyed.

"Let them go, Perrine," he said, in a low tone, "they are evidently good girls, and unaccustomed to such 'larks.' If you must amuse yourself in this way, you can easily find enough of your own stamp who will not refuse your attentions."

"Ah, but Lorrain, we've found a jewel here," indicating Margaret. "One doesn't often meet such a pretty face or hear such a voice as yonder grisette possesses. You let us alone, my loud count—you are not accountable for any sins but your own."

"I thank fortune that offering insults to innocent girls is a sin that I shall not have to answer for," returned

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the count. "And you forget, Perrine, that the rules of this house forbid any but ladies and friends of the members of the club to be entertained here."

Perrine frowned.

"I know it," he admitted; "but we had to bring them in here, or be balked in our fun."

Margaret gathered courage from these remarks. She saw the count did not like to interfere with Perrine's affairs, but she could not believe that he would refuse to aid her if directly appealed to. She was upon the point of doing this when Perrine, unheeding both Annette's pleading and his friend's reproof, approached her.

"My pretty one," he began, insinuatingly, "lift that obnoxious vail; do not be so coy and try to hide your charms. Come, come, I insist."

He would have torn the covering from her face, but she held it closely gathered under her chin with her right hand, while she put out her left to keep him off.

He laughed gayly at this, and then turned to speak to his companion, who, apparently, was his servant.

He gave him some command in a low tone, and he immediately left the room.

Margaret breathed more freely as he passed out, for there was one less to contend with now.

Perrine bent forward again and seized the hand she had thrust out against him.

She instantly wrenched it from his grasp, and in the act her mitten was torn off, disclosing her delicate hand and the brilliant diamond that sparkled on her third finger.

The young man looked a trifle startled as his eyes fell upon the glittering stone.

"That is a fine stone for the hand of a waiting maid," he said, in astonishment. "Hast thou been tampering with thy mistress' jewel-box. Truly, thy hand is dainty enough for the finest gems; if thy face corresponds we have found a marvelous prize. Come, sweet, your charming coyness only aggravates my curiosity."

Again he laid his hand upon her vail, and was about to rudely tear it from her grasp, when he was startled

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and arrested in the act by a clear, bell-like voice exclaiming authoritatively:

"Mons. Perrine, release me instantly. I command you!"

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## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### AN APOLOGY.

The young man started back instinctively.

There was no mistaking that tone; it was the voice, the command of a lady.

Margaret had drawn her figure to its fullest height, and something in her attitude half awed him, while Count Lorrain had sprung to his feet astonished, as that clear voice fell upon his ears. Surely he had heard it before.

"You will get yourself into trouble, Perrine; there is something in this you have no right to pry into; you had better let them go," he said, almost sternly.

The caution appeared only to irritate the young man.

"Bah, 'tis only a grisette. I am not to be cowed by any such trick; it is only the ruse of a waiting maid assuming the airs of her mistress. No, no, pretty one," Perrine continued, turning again to Margaret; "I am not to be fooled like this; your voice is the voice of a nightingale, your hand like that of a princess, and your manner like that of a queen. I am going to have a look at that charming face of yours, whether you will or no."

Margaret saw that there was no use in resisting further; she was only subjecting herself every moment to added indignity and torture.

There were only these two men in the room; she knew both of them personally. She knew that she could appeal to the honor and protection of Count Lorrain, and he would gladly shield her from further insult if she should but reveal her identity.

"Do you comprehend, petite, 'whether you will or no?'" Perrine repeated, leaning nearer her yet, hesitating to put his threat into execution.

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"Very well; stand back, Mons. Perrine, and you shall have your wish," Margaret returned.

"*Parblieu!*" exclaimed the young man, recoiling from her more startled than before.

"Surely I know that voice," cried Count Lorrain, growing pale, and moving a step nearer the group.

Without a word, and with a single sweep of her white hand, Margaret threw aside her vail.

In the act her hat fell to the floor, and she stood there, before her astonished captor, proud and haughty as a queen, with indignation flashing from her glorious eyes.

Mons. Perrine was stricken dumb. Of course he recognized her instantly, and he staggered back from her as if he had been smitten by a blow.

"Mlle. Houghton!" cried Count Lorrain, springing forward to her side, his face absolutely colorless. "Pardon! pardon! that such an indignity should have been offered you in my presence."

"Is it because I am Miss Houghton instead of an humbly waiting maid that an apology is tendered me?"

"No, indeed, mademoiselle; but it moves me more deeply, knowing you as I do. I would not have allowed any harm to come to either of you. I was even trying to devise some way to help you out of your difficulty," he concluded, in a low tone.

"I believe you, Count Lorrain," replied Margaret, more calmly, "and I know I do not need to appeal to you for protection against further annoyance."

"Surely you do not; most gladly will I serve you in any way. Now what shall I do? call a carriage and attend you home?"

"If you please; but first tell me where I am," Margaret said, looking about the luxurious room with an anxious expression on her face.

"You are in a perfectly respectable place, mademoiselle," the count replied, reading her fears. "This is the parlor of a private club-house, owned by a half-dozen gentlemen, and it is not unusual for us to entertain our lady friends here; therefore you are in no way compromised by being in this place."

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Margaret heaved a sigh of relief at the information, and Count Lorrain, moving to the mantel, rang a bell.

A moment later there came a tap on the door, and stepping to it, he spoke a few words to some one without, and then came back to Margaret, who had seated herself upon a sofa and beckoned to Annette to do the same.

"I cannot tell you," said the count, regretfully, "how I deplore what has happened—the annoyance, the distress you have suffered. Mons. Perrine has overstepped all bounds in doing as he has done this evening, and it would be no more than his due if he was expelled from the club on account of it," he concluded, turning sternly to that abashed individual, who had dropped into the nearest chair and seemed overcome with confusion and shame.

He glanced up appealingly as the count spoke his name.

"I crave, most humbly, mademoiselle's pardon; I am undone—I am confounded," he said.

Margaret bent her flashing glance upon him for an instant, but she deigned no reply.

"Some explanation is due you for my being in this costume," she said, turning to the count, a bright flush on her cheek; "I am afraid it was a very rash thing for me to venture out thus, but a deed of charity called me forth —one which could not go unheeded—so I took my maid, and clad as another, I hoped to escape recognition by any one who might know me."

"Mlle. Houghton should have taken a carriage," returned the count, wondering what "deed of charity" could have called them out so late at night.

"Yes, it would have been safer perhaps; but—circumstances conspired against my doing so. Can I—may I ask as a personal favor, that Count Lorrain will regard what has transpired as a matter of confidence?"

"Most certainly, mademoiselle; you may trust me fully," he replied, gravely.

Then turning to his companion, he said, sternly:

"You understand, Perrine, this is to be kept between ourselves, and you will instruct your valet."

"There need be no fear. Ah! if I could but hope to secure mademoiselle's pardon!" he concluded.

"Mons. Perrine," said Margaret, turning to him after

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a moment of reflection, "if I could be assured that this experience would be a profitable lesson to you—that it would lead you to feel respect for womanhood, whether in the person of the high-bred lady or the humble waiting maid, it might do much toward softening the present state of my feelings toward you—my indignation—my resentment."

"I pledge mademoiselle my word of honor—I swear, I will never be guilty of a like offense again."

"Has monsieur a sister?" Margaret asked, gently.

"Yes—a lovely maiden of fifteen years," he answered, his face kindling with pride and affection.

"Monsieur loves her?"

"I adore her—she is an angel!" he cried.

"Can Mons. Perrine imagine her in such a position as I have been in to-night?"

"The saints forbid!" he exclaimed, his face growing white as death.

"Monsieur would resent it?" Margaret questioned.

"I would kill the man who dared assail her," he cried.

Margaret laid her hand upon the shoulder of Annette, who was sitting beside her and regarding her with a look of adoration in her eyes.

She was beautiful as "an angel," with that earnest gravity on her face, and the light of a holy purpose in her lovely eyes.

"This young girl," she said, solemnly, "though in humbler circumstances than your sister, monsieur, is nevertheless, as good and pure as the fair maiden whom monsieur so fondly loves. She is a woman, and——" Margaret paused an instant, impressively raising her hand, as if to give greater effect to her words, "a woman's innocence, and purity, and self-respect, be she high or low, rich or poor, are the most precious things she possesses; they are jewels which God has given her to guard and give back to him untarnished, and he who would rob her of them deserves not the name of man, nor a place among men—he should be wiped off the face of the earth."

"Ah! what a wretch I have been!" muttered the young man, flushing scarlet beneath her scathing words.

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"In my own country," Margaret continued, "where social distinction is not so marked as it is here, every good woman regards every other, who is pure and true, as her sister, and resents all indignity offered her, as she would do if it was offered herself. This girl, who is with me to-night, is my friend as well as my servant; she has rendered me faithful service, and she has been as deeply pained—as greatly wronged as I, myself."

There was a moment of silence, after Margaret concluded, during which Count Lorrain stood regarding this brave, beautiful woman with astonishment, mingled with profound admiration; and, had she looked into his eyes just then, she might have read there even a tenderer sentiment.

Then something occurred that amazed them all.

Mons. Perrine stood irresolute one moment, the next he lifted his head with a determined air and walked with a firm tread to where Annette was sitting.

"Mademoiselle," he said, addressing her, and speaking as courteously as if he had been addressing Margaret herself, "I humbly crave your pardon for the unwarrantable annoyance this evening. It was base! it was ignoble! Pray forgive me."

Annette blushed crimson. She had never imagined that such a thing could happen. A rich young man, occupying a high position in the brilliant circles of Paris, humbly apologizing to a grisette! but she responded, modestly and simply:

"Monsieur is pardoned."

"Thanks; and Mlle. Houghton?" he faltered, turning to Margaret, with an appealing look.

She arose and frankly extended her hand, with a smile that was bewildering to both gentlemen.

"I believe Mons. Perrine is sincere, else I should never offer him my hand," she said, kindly. He is fully forgiven, and—may I have his pledge that, henceforth, he will respect my sex in every sphere in life?"

"Verily, mademoiselle, as Heaven is my witness."

He bent and touched his lips to the hand extended to him, with a humility that plainly indicated that he did not deem himself worthy to take it in his own.

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"I thank mademoiselle for her unexampled kindness," he continued, "she has indeed given me a lesson this night which I shall never forget. I hope—I *believe* I will be a better man all my life for it."

He bowed low before her; then turning, left the room, without another word.

Margaret sank wearily upon the sofa, feeling greatly unnerved now that this trying ordeal was over.

Count Lorrain sprang to the table, poured out a glass of wine, and brought it to her.

"Mademoiselle is faint—drink this," he said, kindly.

She was only too glad of something to brace her trembling nerves, and accepted it gratefully.

The count offered another to Annette, but the girl modestly declined it, and, at that moment, there came another tap upon the door.

Count Lorrain answered it, and, after a moment, came back to Margaret, saying that a carriage was waiting for her, whenever she felt able to return home.

She at once arose, replaced her hat, and drew her vail closely about her face. She remembered that she had been told the house was owned by half a dozen gentlemen, and she feared to meet others whom she knew.

Count Lorrain offered her his arm and led her out by the main entrance, the one by which she had entered being a private one, at the rear of the house. They passed through a magnificent hall and vestibule, down a flight of marble steps to a carriage drawn by two superb black horses.

Just as she was passing out, some one was coming down stairs.

The step was familiar, and her heart sank like lead, as all at once the individual stopped midway and turned to address some one above; for she recognized the voice as that of Arthur Aspinwall.

She grasped the arm upon which she was leaning, almost convulsively. What would he think to find her there?

"Do not fear?" the count murmured, and without allowing her to increase her speed in the least, he led her quietly out, and put her into the carriage, while she saw

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Arthur pass the door and enter the room she had just left.

"What an escape!" she breathed, in a trembling tone.

"Yes, it was fortunate," said her companion, in a low voice; then he added with delicate forethought: "Perhaps mademoiselle would prefer to return alone with her maid?"

"Thanks—yes, if you please," she answered, feeling that she would be glad to be alone after her recent excitement.

"She can feel perfectly safe," he added, in the same subdued tone; "for this is my own carriage and my own driver, and nothing can happen to her. I sincerely regret the annoyance of this evening, and trust that Mademoiselle Houghton will not judge all men villains because she has been badly used by one."

"No, no, Count Lorrain; you have been most noble—most kind. I shall always esteem you as a friend," Margaret said, earnestly, while she extended her hand to him.

He took it respectfully.

"Thanks," he said, in a voice that trembled; then added: "May I have the honor of calling upon you soon, mademoiselle?"

"I shall be happy to see you by the end of another week, Count Lorrain; then I hope I shall be able to explain to you more fully why I was abroad to-night unattended except by my maid, and in this disguise."

"I doubt not there was a good reason; but in Paris it is impossible for so fair a face to escape observation. I—I hope it will not be necessary for you to venture forth in the same way again," he concluded, anxiously.

"Indeed, I shall not venture; I shall never subject myself to a second experience of this kind," Margaret said, with decision, and inwardly resolving that she would go boldly to Louis in the open day; she never could go through again what she had endured to-night.

"You greatly relieve my mind, Mademoiselle Houghton; and now adieu."

The count lifted his hat and bowed; then shut the carriage door, spoke a few words to his coachman, and the

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two weary but grateful girls were driven away to their home.

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## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### ANOTHER SECRET VISIT.

Margaret and Annette reached home in safety, and, having a key to the night-latch, they let themselves in without attracting attention.

Margaret had just removed her humble attire, donned a white wrapper, and, with a crimson shawl thrown about her shoulders, was sitting before the grate in her own room, with Annette brushing her abundant hair, when she heard her father and mother return.

Mrs. Houghton soon after came in, as was her custom before retiring, to see if her daughter was comfortable, but she stopped involuntarily upon the threshold, as if struck by something unusual in her appearance.

Annette had just gathered up those masses of shimmering gold into a graceful knot at the back of her small head, but a few fluffy stray locks, like finely spun sunshine, fell over her fair white brow; her eyes seemed more deeply, darkly blue than usual; there was a flush upon her cheeks, her lips were a vivid scarlet, while a smile, that made the heart of her mother thrill with sudden joy, trembled among their beautiful curves.

"Margie," Mrs. Houghton said, coming forward, and laying her hand upon her shoulder, bent down to look more closely into her face, "how well you are looking tonight! Is it the glow of the firelight, or because the crimson shawl is so becoming to you?"

"Perhaps it may be the effect of both, mamma," the young girl answered, lightly, while she lifted her mother's hand from her shoulder and laid it fondly against her cheek.

How she longed to tell her of the new joy that was beating in her heart; of the glad hope that seemed all at once to have given her new life and strength; but, no, she would keep it to herself till her own and Louis' triumph was complete.

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"Did you have a pleasant time this evening?" she asked, after a moment of silence.

"It would have been delightful, dear, if you could have enjoyed it with me, Mrs. Houghton said, tenderly. "It was one of the most brilliant receptions I have ever attended in Paris; and, by the way, I learned some news that I think will interest you."

"Some news, mamma?" Margaret repeated.

"Yes; you doubtless remember that young and handsome Mons. Perrine, who was so attentive to Ada for a while—what *is* the matter, dear?" Mrs. Houghton exclaimed, stopping short in the midst of her news, for Margaret had started violently at the sound of that name, while both comb and brush which Annette was preparing to put away fell clattering upon the marble hearth at her feet.

"Why, Annette, what a noise!" Margaret said, making that an excuse for the shock she had received.

"I am very sorry, mademoiselle," humbly apologized the girl.

"Well, never mind—of course I know you did not mean to be careless," Margaret returned, giving her a kind and significant look. "Now, mamma, go on with your story, please," she continued, turning again to her mother.

"It is reported that an uncle of his has just died, and young Perrine, being his nearest of kin, inherits his title and immense wealth; and you know he is considered very wealthy himself."

"A title, did you say, mamma?"

"Yes; he becomes now the Marquis of Perrine. It would be singular if our dear Ada should eventually become a titled French lady, would it not?"

"I do not know; it is not an infrequent occurrence for Americans to come abroad and marry among the nobility," Margaret answered, but she looked very grave.

She knew that Ada had greatly admired the gay, handsome young man, though she believed that her love was given to her cousin, Arthur Aspinwall.

Still, if it should be proved that Arthur was a criminal, she did not believe that she would ever marry him, even

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if he should finally turn to her for affection and sympathy; and thus it might be possible that the young French marquis would seek her and succeed in winning her. But she was not sure that she should like to see her the wife of such a man—she could not tell whether the repentance he had expressed to her that night would be lasting.

Of course, she betrayed none of these reflections to her mother, who, after chatting a few minutes longer upon that and other topics, bade her daughter a fond good-night and retired to her own room.

The next morning Margaret surprised her mother by coming down stairs attired for a walk; and wonder of wonders! she had discarded her somber black and appeared in a lovely suit of dark blue velvet, richly trimmed with fur, and a dainty hat of the same material, adorned with a beautiful bird of paradise!

"Why, Margie! you did not tell me that you were going out!" Mrs. Houghton remarked.

"No, mamam; but I have taken a sudden notion that I will be very industrious. I am going out to match some flosses and try to finish that mantel-lambrequin which I began so long ago."

"Why don't you have the carriage, dear? you must not forget that you have not been very strong of late."

"I feel just like taking a brisk walk in the keen air; it is lovely out this morning," Margaret responded.

"Well, dear, just as you like, perhaps the walk will do you more good than the ride," replied Mrs. Houghton, unsuspiciously, and the young girl tripped away with an elastic step.

A few moments later Mr. Houghton entered.

"What is it, Wallace?" his wife exclaimed, in alarm, observing his white face and agitated manner.

"They have found him—they arrested that man."

"Whom?" she cried, eagerly.

"Murray, Louis' father. They discovered him in a miserable gambling-house, and under the influence of liquor; he was excited, and from his talk, they suspected who he was, although he has been known by another name all along. He seemed to have plenty of money, too, and that was another suspicious fact. Some one asked him

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where his son Louis was, and he cursed him, with an oath, saying that he was 'too mean and tight to bleed well, that he would not part with his gold even to save his own father from starving.' When they arrested him, however, he seemed to come to himself, denied that he was Murray and all knowledge of Louis, claiming that he was a single man and had no son. It was too late though, and he is now safely lodged behind iron bars."

"We must try and keep it from Margie; she was so bright and like her old self this morning," said Mrs. Houghton, looking greatly distressed.

"We cannot keep it from her, the papers will be full of it. I wish, though, we were safely across the Atlantic," observed Mr. Houghton, moodily.

Meanwhile Margaret proceeded directly to a hardware store and made the purchases that Louis had desired, and then slipping them deftly out of sight into a deep pocket in the skirt of her dress, inquired for some fancy brass-headed tacks, suitable for upholstering.

Supplied with these she turned to leave the store.

Just outside the door, to her consternation, she encountered Arthur Aspinwall! Like a phantom he seemed to rise up in her path wherever she went.

He had turned the corner of the street a little above, just as she had entered the store; he recognized her by her dress—it being a suit he had always admired—and his curiosity was aroused to the highest pitch to know what she could wish to purchase in a place of that kind.

Margaret's heart bounded into her throat as she saw him. What if he had been looking in at one of the windows while she was buying the saw and file? His suspicions would be instantly aroused, and all her plans defeated, she thought.

But she controlled her agitation marvelously well, and glanced up at him with a smile of greeting.

"Good-morning," she said, "how queer that we should meet here."

"That is just what I was thinking," he returned, observing her closely. "What is there in this line of goods that a lady like you can possibly want or need?"

"I have not much use for many of the implements kept

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here," she said, "but I am going into the upholstering business presently; these are what I have been buying, and you may carry them for me, if you please."

She slipped the package of tacks into his hands as she spoke, adding in explanation:

"They are fancy-headed tacks, used for putting up lambrequins and in finishing off chair cushions; put them in your pocket, please, and then if you have nothing more important to do, come with me while I select some materials for my lambrequins.

She was playing a deep game.

She ment to inveigle him into some arrangement, or make him commit himself to some appointment, so that she could find an opportunity to visit Louis during the day without any fear of being detected by him.

Arthur unsuspiciously pocketed her package, while he said, with a significant look:

"I can never have anything more important to do, Margie, than to obey your commands or accede to your requests."

Margaret bit the inside of her lip until she nearly cried out with pain at his fond words.

She hated herself for the duplicity she was practicing, yet the exigency of affairs seemed to demand it. She would risk everything, and sacrifice her own feelings for the sake of Louis' safety.

"Then," she retorted in reply to his observation, while she shot a sly glance at him, "my first command is, that you shall not talk nonsense to me; my second, that you act as my cavalier this morning, carry my bundles, and make yourself generally useful, and be treated to an invitation to lunch afterward, as a reward for your good behavior."

"Ah, who could resist such temptations as those—your commands—excepting the first one—are but pleasure, and as seductive as the promised reward," he responded, gayly.

"One is as imperative as another, and you are breaking my first already, sir; give me back my tacks, and I will go on by myself," Margaret returned, with an air of mock displeasure.

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"Please, ma'am, I won't do so any more—I will be good," Arthur pleaded, with boyish humility, and boldly taking possession of her shopping-bag, he surrendered himself to her service.

It was not often that he found her so pleasant and amiable, and he enjoyed her company very much. Her purchases were at last completed, and they turned their faces homeward, where they arrived just in time for lunch.

Mrs. Houghton looked surprised to see them come in together, for she could not fail to see, of late, that Arthur's society had been distasteful to Margaret; but she concealed her feelings, and their lunch proved the gayest meal that had been eaten in that house for many a day.

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## CHAPTER XXXV.

### A LITTLE STRATAGEM.

"Mamma, let us drive out to Buttes Chamont this afternoon," Margaret suddenly proposed while they were at lunch. "I have never had a view of the city from that point in the winter, and we could get a fine one to-day, it is so pleasant, and the air so clear."

"Very well; I am ready for any expedition that will interest you," Mrs. Houghton responded, glad to accede to anything that would please her daughter, if by so doing she could keep that bright look on her face.

"Can you go, too, Arthur? Are you at liberty for all day?" Margaret asked, turning persuasively to him.

"Certainly I can go. I should be delighted."

"Then I am going to send a note to Floy Arnold and invite her to come with us," said Margaret.

Floy Arnold was a young lady from New York, whose acquaintance the Houghtons had made in the early part of the winter. She had come to Paris for a year to acquire the correct pronunciation of the language, and she had been a very kind and sympathizing friend to Margie during her trouble.

"That will make a party of four, and just a carriage full," Margaret continued, adding, with pretty impera-

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tiveness: "And I lay my command upon you, Sir Arthur, to carry the invitation to her directly after lunch, and use your most persuasive powers to induce her to accompany us."

It was very artful, and she knew it, to make him commit himself thus—to make him carry the note to the young girl, and thus virtually pledge himself to her to act as an escort to the party, of which she had no intention of making one.

"Your commands are always as a law unto me," Arthur gallantly responded.

"Thanks; excuse me, then, and I will write it at once," Margaret said, rising hastily from the table, to stem the indignant tide which she felt creeping up to her brow in a hot flush at his presumption in saying fond things to her.

How she longed for the time when she could unmask him, and tell him she knew what a miserable villain he was.

"What hour shall I tell Floy, mamma—three?"

"Just as you like; suit yourself, Margie, and the rest of us will be satisfied," said her mother.

So she wrote the note and said "three o'clock." Arthur was soon on his way to Miss Arnold with it, and commissioned also to stop at the stable and order Mrs. Houghton's barouche to be at her door promptly at a quarter to three.

A little before that time he presented himself again in her parlor, to find, to his chagrin, Margaret lying upon a sofa, covered with an afghan, her head bound about with a wet napkin, and looking very flushed and feverish, while the room was full of the odor of aromatic vinegar.

"What is the matter?" he questioned in alarm.

"Nothing serious, I hope," Mrs. Houghton answered, "only Margie, I fear, has taken a sudden cold by going out this morning. She complained of a headache soon after you left, her face grew very much flushed, and she seemed nervous and feverish."

"Then of course you cannot go to Buttes Chamont," the young man said, in a disappointed tone.

"Mamma thinks it will not do for me to go," she re-

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plied, with a slight smile, but almost dazzling him by the brilliancy of the glance she lifted to him.

"No; I think it will be best for her remain quietly at home. There will be some other opportunity for a view from Buttes Chamont."

"Then I suppose I shall order the carriage back to the stable when it comes," said Arthur, "and we will postpone our trip indefinitely."

"That would perhaps be best, if we had not invited Floy to go with us," Margaret interposed, thoughtfully. "I wrote her that we should call for her promptly at three, and to be sure to be ready. She said she would go, did she not?"

"Yes; she seemed much pleased by the prospect," Arthur admitted, reluctantly.

"Margie, I cannot bear the idea of going and leaving you at home sick and alone," said her mother.

"Never mind me, mamma," Margaret answered cheerfully. "Annette can do anything necessary for me, and it would be hardly fair or civil to disappoint Floy."

"That is true, but Arthur could drive around and explain matters to her. She would excuse us, I know," returned Mrs. Houghton.

"I would not do that. Really there is no need of giving up the drive on my account," Margaret urged. "It will look as if I was of more account than any one else, and I know Floy would feel it. She will of course, be somewhat disappointed that I cannot go, but Arthur will be company for her, you can act as chaperon. and some time we will make up another party and go again."

Arthur would gladly have excused himself. Miss Arnold was very nice, but she was not Margaret, and the charm of the excursion for him was all gone now that she could not go. But it would be very ungallant to refuse to accompany the ladies, particularly as he had himself been the bearer of the invitation to Miss Arnold, and urged her acceptance of it.

Therefore Mrs. Houghton and Mr. Aspinwall reluctantly departed in the carriage, but resolved that they would not be gone longer than politeness to their young guest required.

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The sound of the wheels had not entirely died away before Margaret sprang to her feet and flitted like a spirit up stairs, untying the bandage from her brow as she went.

She hastily assumed the simple costume that she had worn the previous evening, taking the precaution this time to tie a thick veil over her face.

She was about ready to descend again, when she paused at the head of the stairs, as if considering some project that had suddenly presented itself to her mind.

At length she turned slowly back and entered her father's chamber.

Opening a drawer in an escritoire, she took from it a black morocco case.

Touching a spring, the lid flew back, disclosing a handsome silver-mounted revolver.

She examined it closely, and saw that the chambers were empty, and turning her attention again to the drawer from which she had taken the weapon, she searched until she found a small box containing cartridges.

Both of these articles she concealed beneath her wrap, then quickly left the room and the house.

She hurried through the streets toward her destination, for she knew well enough that her mother would shorten her drive on her account and she must be back before the party returned from Buttes Chamont.

Reaching the Rue de Blanc, she walked boldly along the street, and on arriving at the alley, turned unhesitatingly into it, as if it were her intention to pass through the Rue de Castiglione.

She turned and glanced behind her after a moment, but no one had appeared to notice her; and watching her opportunity when no one was opposite the opening, she sprang up the steps of the building she wished to enter, and passed within, closing the door after her this time. It was broad daylight now; she had been over the ground and knew the way well, and did not fear to be locked in now; besides, it would keep out intruders.

She ran lightly up stairs and tapped gently on the door of the room where her lover was confined.

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"Louis, I have come, she said.

"Margie!" came the quick, eager response, and the next moment she was in his presence. "My darling!" he cried, " have you dared to venture here in the day-time?"

Ah, if he only knew why she could never venture to come there in the night again! But she would not tell him that yet.

She went up to him, and put both her hands out to him.

"It was much pleasanter to come by daylight," she said, smiling.

He took those two small hands and kissed them tenderly.

"But I fear it is not safe, dear, if we hope to accomplish our purpose; *he* is liable to come at any hour, and he has not been here yet to-day."

A silvery laugh of triumph broke from her lips.

"He will not come for a couple of hours at least," she said.

Then she told him how she had managed to send him away, so that he could not come that afternoon.

"I went out this morning and bought what you wanted," she went on. "Here is the saw, and this is the file. Oh, Louis, I hope you will make speedy work, for I am wild to have you free once more."

"You must not be too impatient, Margie," he said, fondly. "I will complain of nothing now, if I can only restore that money to the company. You are a treasure, dear, to get me these tools so promptly, and you may be sure I shall not delay in putting them to efficient service."

"But those are not all, Louis—see!" and she placed in his hands her father's revolver and cartridge box.

"Oh, Margie, how did you happen to be so thoughtful? They are life and freedom for me!" he exclaimed, as he critically examined the revolver. "Margaie, I fear nothing now!"

"Let us hope that you will not need to use the weapon. To save precious time begin work at once. How long will it take you?"

"I cannot say; these iron bars are very strong, and I shall have to take out at least two before I shall have

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an aperture large enough to get through. Did you bring me the wax?"

"Ah! yes; I nearly forgot that," and she produced it.

"Thanks; that will do nicely. Now I think I shall take out these two bars by the safe. Aspinwall will be less likely to notice them than any of the others. But I shall have to move it—the safe—a little in order to get at them, and so I believe I will wait until evening, for if he should come in and find anything out of place, his suspicions would be aroused at once."

"That is true—perhaps it would be well to wait; but I am so impatient."

"I am not going to let you stay much longer, my darling," Louis said. "I am in dread lest you should be found her. Sit down, however, for fifteen minutes, and tell me something about these long weeks, since I have been shut up away from you; then I will send you away, and you must wait patiently until I come to you."

"Do you mean that I must not come again?" Margaret asked, quickly, and with clouded face.

"Yes; I do not think this is a safe locality for you to be in; besides, your frequent coming might attract attention and arouse suspicion that something was wrong here."

"Well, I will do as you say, and try to be patient," Margaret said, gravely; then added, eagerly:

"But, Louis, how will you be able to get out of the building, even if you succeed in getting out of this wretched cage?"

"How stupid of me not to have thought of that!" he replied, laughing. "I wish you would leave me your keys, but that would not do, for then you could not lock the doors after you. I think you will have to come once more, Margie, after all. I am sorry, but I see no other way."

"I shall not mind."

"Well, then, wait a few days—say three; then I trust I shall be able to meet you on the outside of this place. You can then let me have your keys, and I will take care of the locks while I am looking for my treasure."

"But, Louis, I do not believe you will find the money

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here; where could he hide it in this empty building?" Margaret asked.

"There are plenty of places," he replied—"between the floors, in the cellar, or even in a door-casing."

"What makes you think that he concealed it here?"

"I notice that almost always after he leaves me, Aspinwall goes prowling about, while his movements are very stealthy and cat-like; and I am sure there is nothing to detain him here unless it is to look after his ill-gotten gains."

"Well, I hope you will prove your theory correct."

She remained a little longer with him, giving him some account of herself and how she had followed the clew of the lost diamond. Then, at his urgent entreaty, she reluctantly departed, and soon afterward reached her own home. After resuming her wrapper, she took up the paper, and there, to her surprise, read an account of the arrest of Louis Murray, and the suspicious circumstances which seemed to conect him with Louis Dunbar's disappearance and the robbery of his safe.

"But for what *I* have done, circumstantial evidence might convict an innocent man," she murmured to herself, as after reading the account, she threw the paper aside and fell to musing upon the joys in store for her.

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## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### ARTHUR IS SURPRISED.

When the party returned from Buttes Chamont they found their fair invalid much improved.

She was sitting in her favorite nook by the fire, her pretty slippered feet resting upon the low fender, and actually engaged upon the embroidery of her long-neglected lambrequin, while she looked as bewitchingly lovely in her white *negligé,* with her crimson shawl about her shoulders, as it is possible for any one to be.

"You are better, Margie?" exclaimed Mrs. Houghton, in a relieved tone, as she entered the room.

"Much better, mamma," she replied, with a bright smile.

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"But I am afraid you are feverish still; your cheeks are very red and your eyes unnaturally bright," continued the fond mother, anxiously, while Arthur, who had come in purposely to learn how she was, thought, if such was the case, a feverish state was a very beautifying one to her.

"I think not," Margaret returned; then asked: "Did you have a pleasant drive?"

"Yes, and the view from Buttes Chamont is very fine. We must surely go again some day when you are able; and Floy Arnold is a lovely girl. I am more charmed with her every time I see her. Don't you admire her, Arthur?" inquired Mrs. Houghton.

"Yes," he replied, indifferently, while his eyes plainly betrayed that, to him, no one was as lovely as Margaret Houghton.

"Take off your coat and stop to dinner," his hostess said to him, as she removed her own cloak and hat.

He started and flushed at the invitation.

"Thanks, but I cannot," he said. "I have an important engagement which *may* result in my being obliged to leave town for a few days, and I must run away this minute."

Margaret's heart throbbed so audibly that she thought the pulsations could be heard by all in the room. Ah, she had not been a minute too soon in carrying Louis relief.

"Going out of town, Arthur?" she asked.

He was almost dazzled by the light in her eyes, while an uncomfortable thrill ran through him.

"I may not go to-night; but, Margie, I am afraid you *are* very feverish. I never saw your eyes so bright before."

She laughed out lightly to hide her agitation.

"Well, I confess I have been very nervous this afternoon; but my headache is all gone, and I shall be all right after to-night's rest."

"I hope so, truly," he said, heartily; then, taking leave of them both he went away.

He repaired directly to his lodgings and informed his landlady that he might be out of town for a few days,

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although she need not be surprised if he returned by night.

A little later he went forth again, carrying a neatly made-up package in his hands.

He proceeded to the Rue Castiglone, where, entering a provision monger's shop, he purchased a basket, which he filled with bread, meat, and various other articles of food; then kept on down the street, and finally turned into the alley which led to the Rue le Blanc.

About midway of this, he quietly slipped into a deep doorway, where he opened his package and quickly donned a long great-colored wig and beard as white as snow, and a tall old-fashioned silk hat, putting the soft traveling-cap he wore into one of his capacious pockets; then he proceeded toward the building where Louis Dunbar was imprisoned.

This had been his habit—to enter that alley from one street and go out at the other end; thus, anyone having seen him enter from the Rue de Castiglione in one dress and happening to meet him elsewhere on leaving the alley at the other end in another, would not recognize him as the same person.

After Margaret's departure that afternoon, Louis sat down and fell into a brown study. He must have sat there nearly an hour when he aroused himself.

"I believe I will risk it," he said. "I am getting desperate. He is sure to go off with that gold before very long; then I shall not know where to look for it."

He concealed the saw and file, then examined the revolver with great care and finally loaded every one of its chambers.

It was after dark when he heard a slight noise below and knew that Arthur Aspinwall was about to pay him a visit, to renew his stock of provisions.

It was somewhat later than he was in the habit of coming, but that was all the better for the plan that he had in view.

He hastily laid his revolver upon the table and covered it with a newspaper; the next moment a key was inserted in the door of his room, when the white head and beard of his jailer came into view.

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"Ah! good-evening; I trust I find you comfortable," he said, coming forward and bowing with mock politeness, while he set his basket upon the floor, with a sigh of relief, for it was heavy.

Louis made no reply, although he eyed the basket that Arthur had brought, with some surprise.

"That contains your provisions," the young man said, remarking it. "I have brought you a bountiful supply today, for I may not have the pleasure of seeing you for a few days; I am going out of town for a time, and you'll have to make the contents of this basket do you until I return."

Louis' heart gave a startled bound at this intelligence. "It is as I feared," he thought. "He is about to decamp with his booty."

"How long do you intend to be away?" he asked.

"I cannot tell—it will depend upon circumstances."

"How much longer do you intend to keep me here?"

"Until you will swear to me that you will leave the country."

"Where could I go that I should not be recognized and arrested for the crime that you have committed?"

"You can go to Australia, or some other remote country. I will furnish you with an effectual disguise, and as the excitement regarding the affair has somewhat subsided, you would have no difficulty in escaping, and in some far-off land, with your wonderful energy and perseverance," this with a sneer, "you could readily carve out a fortune for yourself."

"Suppose I refuse to do this? You cannot keep me here always. Your continual coming to this uninhabited building will eventually excite suspicion."

"I am aware of that," Arthur retorted, "but there are other ways of taking care of you. I don't mean that I have any designs upon your life," he added, as he caught the sharp look that Louis bestowed upon him. "I have no desire to stain my hands with your blood, though it is not because I bear you any love, as you well know. But there are plenty of places in and about Paris where you could be so well and effectually cared for that no one would ever be troubled on your account."

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"You mean——"

"I mean a private mad-house," interrupted Arthur. "It is not a novel idea I know, but it is an effectual one for troublesome enemies, nevertheless."

"You would not dare," retorted Louis, growing pale.

"Oh, but I should 'dare,'" Arthur replied, promptly. "I have too much at stake not to dare a great deal. You have been my evil genius ever since I first knew you."

"Say, rather, that you have been mine, for you tried to ruin me even when I was a boy."

"I hated you!" cried Arthur, excitedly; "and my hatred did not abate when you crossed my path again in Paris. Margaret Houghton would have been my wife long before this but for you."

"Margaret Houghton never would have married you."

"Ha, ha! how confident we are," responded Arthur, derisively; but let me assure you that you are liable to be mistaken. I'll wager a new hat against a pair of gloves that she will be Mrs. Arthur Aspinwall in less than six months."

Louis Dunbar's hands opened and closed convulsively.

"Then that is your 'stake,' as you term it," he quietly said, restraining his anger with a great effort.

"Well, I may as well speak plainly," returned Arthur. "I love the girl, and I am bound to win her if it can be done, and her money too. So you can make up your mind to relinquish all claim upon her for once and forever. If you will agree to this, and swear to leave the country in the way which I provide, you can leave this place any time you choose; if not, you will go into some other place forthwith, where you will never trouble me again."

"Are you not fearful that I should feel justified in breaking such an oath, if I could be persuaded to take it?"

"No; I believe that if you once gave me your word of honor you would never break it."

"You are right; I should never break my word; but I shall never give it," Louis said, firmly.

"Then you know the alternative," his companion retorted, growing very white.

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"I shall denounce you to the authorities the moment I am free."

"You will never be free to do it. But," he added, after a moment of thought; "if Margaret Houghton were my wife to-day you could not harm me; you might go free and welcome; I should be glad to wash my hands of you."

"How can that be, when I should have you instantly arrested for the robbery of my office and for detaining me in this vile place?"

"Who would believe you?" sneered Arthur. "You would be the one to be arrested; you disappeared and the money vanished at the same time. Not a shadow of suspicion has rested upon me. I have lived my usual life, going and coming according to my custom, and no one has the slightest knowledge of the events of that night, while you could produce no evidence to prove your assertions, and you can imagine how they would be received."

Yesterday, at that time, this reasoning would have appeared incontestable to Louis, but how he exulted that, through the zeal and tireless exertions of his loved one, the game was all in his own hands.

However, he must adopt some bold measure immediately, for Arthur had evidently arranged his own course of proceedings, and was upon the point of carrying it out.

"Once more I give you the opportunity to accept my proposition," Arthur said.

"I reject it utterly," returned Louis.

The young man before him uttered an oath. He had planned to leave France that night, as Louis had surmised, to carry his spoils to a place of greater safety, and where he could avail himself of them to better advantage.

"You are as obstinate as a mule!" he cried, crossly; "but the consequences be upon your own head. Your fate is sealed, and you may expect the worst upon my return. Here, I will pass these provisions into you, and then I'll leave you again to your own meditations."

He stooped and began to unpack the basket that he had brought.

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He took out several packages and thrust them impatiently between the iron bars, and Louis, taking them, one by one, carried them to his table, and appeared to exercise considerable care in arranging them there.

All but that last one had been thus disposed of.

Arthur was still in a stooping posture, waiting for his prisoner to come and take this; he was busily thinking, and did not look up until Louis came close up to that iron grating; then he raised his head, and found himself looking directly into the barrel of a revolver.

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## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### IN HIS OWN TRAP.

For an instant he seemed paralyzed; a look of blankest surprise settled over his face, which took on the hue of death; a cold sweat came out upon his forehead, and a nervous trembling pervaded his frame.

"Thunder and lightning! Where did you get that?" he at last exclaimed, aghast.

"That is a question which I do not feel disposed to discuss just at present," Louis composedly returned.

"How on earth—— Who has been here? Nobody could get in—I can't understand!" Arthur gasped.

"No, you cannot understand, and I do not intend to enlighten you. It is a self-evident fact, however, that I hold in my hand a Colt's revolver, with which I intend to do good service for myself."

"That means, I suppose, that you intend to kill me?"

"I will spare you upon one condition," Louis answered, still covering his captor with that formidable weapon.

"What is that?" questioned Arthur, to gain time, but knowing well enough what it was.

"That you release me from this place instantly."

"And if I refuse——"

"The consequences will rest upon your own head."

"You would be no better off if you should shoot me. I should lie here and rot, and you would starve," Arthur retorted with an air of desperation.

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"Your proposition sounds conclusive; but you are mistaken," Louis quietly replied. "Allow me to inform you that I have here the means of releasing myself, in the form of a steel file and saw, made expressly for cutting iron; but I do not choose to spend either my strength or my time to effect my own release in that way."

"I don't believe it," cried Arthur, incredulously.

With his eye still fixed upon the man now in his power, and the revolver pointing directly at his head, Louis unbuttoned his coat, and with his left hand drew forth the implements of which he had spoken.

Arthur's face grew almost wild in its expression of fear and astonishment.

"Heavens! who has done this? Who has been here? The doors were safely locked when I came. It is all a mystery to me," he said, in a savage tone.

"Unlock the gate of this place and let me out," commanded Louis.

Arthur hesitated, even though he felt that he was absolutely helpless, while he inwardly cursed himself for coming to the place unarmed; but, then, who would ever have dreamed of anything like this occurring?

"Come," reiterated Louis, in an imperative tone; "you may be very sure that I mean business; as you have already remarked 'I have too much at stake' just now to be very tender-hearted toward you."

One look into his stern face and blazing eye convinced Arthur of that.

And yet, in spite of all, he hated to give in, and stood irresolute. It was terrible to have all his schemes frustrated in this unexpected way, and just at a time, too, when everything was promising so much.

"Unlock that gate!" thundered Louis.

"Will you permit me to go unmolested if I let you out?" Arthur parleyed, and glancing helplessly toward the door.

"I promise nothing," Louis returned, relentlessly. "I shall count five; if the gate is not unlocked on the last number, I fire."

"Blast you! curse you! This is too much—just as my victory seemed complete!" groaned the captor, who was

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now even more helpless than the man whom he had held in his power so long.

"One—two—three——"

Slowly and awfully those threatening sounds fell upon Arthur's ears.

"Hold!" he cried. "If I will tell you where that money is—if I throw up everything and swear to leave the country and never cross your path again, will you let me go?"

He was actually shivering, and his face twitching from nervous excitement, and nearly crushed with humiliation at thus being obliged to reverse the conditions that he had tried to make with Louis only a few moments before.

"Four—fi——"

"Stop, stop—for Heaven's sake! I'll unlock it!" he almost shrieked, as, looking into Louis' blazing eyes, he saw there was not so much as a shadow of relenting in them.

"Put down that revolver," he continued, in a shaking voice. "I can do nothing with the muzzle pointing at me that way."

"No, I shall not put it down—I shall cover you; you are perfectly safe if you do as I tell you. But if you make a bolt for the door, as I see you are meditating, look out for yourself," was the significant response.

Arthur groaned aloud, too plainly for his own comfort; he saw that he had no weak character to deal with, and with trembling hands and a face that was ghastly in its whiteness, he drew from one of the pockets of his coat a key of brass which he proceeded to insert in the ponderous padlock which fastened Louis' prison, and turned it in the lock.

The sound was like the sweetest music in Louis' ears.

"Remove the lock and open the gate," he commanded.

Obediently his foe did as he was told, and Louis walked forth a free man once more.

A long breath of relief and thankfulness escaped him.

"Now, I will take all the keys belonging to this place, if you please," he said, holding out his left hand for them.

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"I will let you out when I go," Arthur said, trying to speak calmly, but glancing almost wildly about him.

"The keys!" repeated Louis, in an inflexible tone.

"Now," he continued, as he received the keys, " we will change places for a while; you will go behind those bars and see how you like the life that I have led during the last few weeks."

"Mercy!" Arthur cried, in despair, and clutching frantically at the massive grating before him, "you do not mean it—you cannot be so relentless."

"But I do mean it—quick! I shall waste no time upon you."

The despairing man saw that there was no reprieve.

With a dejected air and a sinking heart he slunk inside the place where his own victim had so recently been incarcerated, and dropped weakly upon a chair.

Louis quickly closed the gate upon him, returned the padlock to its place, locking it securely, and pocketed the key.

This accomplished, his own strength seemed to fail him, and he, too, sank into a seat to rest and recover himself.

His nerves had been strained to their utmost tension during the last half hour, and now that he was free and all personal danger past, the money safe—for he believed it was safe, even though he did not know where it was —and the thief locked up, the reaction followed.

At first he could hardly realize his good fortune; it seemed almost like an exciting dream—the events of the last two days—and, had it not been for Margaret's thoughtfulness in bringing her father's revolver to him, it might have taken him several days to saw those bars and work himself free; meantime the cunning rogue would have fled with his spoils, the money would have been lost, while his story would never have been credited by half the people who would hear it; he would always have been an object of suspicion, and his honor tarnished for all time.

But now he had the real rogue safe, and he could make his own terms with him.

After resting a while, his strength began to return to

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him in a measure, and with the new hope that was beating strong within him, he felt ready to undertake almost anything for the treasure that he had lost.

"Now, sir," he said, at length, to Arthur, who was sitting in sullen silence, his head bowed upon his hands, "I am going to find out what you have done with that money."

"Are you, really?" was the sarcastic retort.

"Yes; will you tell me what you have done with it?"

"*No,*" with an oath.

"Very well," Louis returned, quietly, and apparently not in the least disturbed by his refusal.

He arose and went toward the door.

"What are you going to do?" demanded Arthur.

"I do not feel obliged to explain my movements or plans to you," coolly replied Louis.

"Come, Dunbar, can't we compromise this matter?" Arthur asked, in a conciliatory tone; "if I will make a clean breast of everything to you, will you let me out of this and give me time to escape the country?"

"No."

"If I will give you a written confession to take to the authorities, will that move you? It is very mean to take advantage of a fellow this way."

"Oh, you begin to see it in that light now."

Arthur flushed angrily.

"You need not twist me," he muttered. "Your father has been arrested for the crime, and, as I understand you are not very fond of him, and have wanted to get rid of him, this would be a good way to do it."

"My father arrested?" Louis cried.

"Yes; he was run down this morning or last night. It came out that he had been trying to bleed you pretty freely and that you had refused his demands; so suspicion naturally fell upon him."

"And you think I would let an innocent man suffer for *your* crime!" Louis indignantly exclaimed.

'*Innocent?* when he has been up to such things all his life. I had no idea you were so fond of the gentleman gambler," retorted Arthur, with a derisive laugh.

"Whatever he may have done in the past, he is guiltless

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of this crime," Louis said, sternly, "and you greatly mistake my character if you imagine I would entertain for a moment your nefarious proposal. I will make *no* conditions with you. I have you just where I want you, and I shall pursue whatever course I may think best. At all events, you may remain just where you are for the present."

"You may keep me here until I starve, or you may give me up to the authorities within an hour; but I will never divulge the secret you are so anxious to learn," Arthur declared, driven to desperation—"you shall *never* have the satisfaction of restoring that money to your company."

"We shall see about that," responded Louis, in an unmoved tone. "Perhaps I shall even ferret it out myself, since I am convinced that it is concealed in this building."

"Ha! what makes you think that?"

Louis was watching him intently, and noticed his surprise and alarm. They confirmed his suspicions.

"I am right," he said to himself, with a thrill of triumph—"it is hidden here."

"Your own movements made me think so," he said aloud. "I have listened to your footsteps, and I am sure that you have not lingered in this empty building simply for the pleasure of walking about."

"Much satisfaction may you derive from that theory," muttered Arthur, mockingly; but his tone was constrained.

Louis turned again toward the door, which he unlocked and passed out into the room beyond, leaving his victim to his own bitter reflections.

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## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### A STRUGGLE FOR LIBERTY.

Meanwhile, Louis was diligently searching for the hiding-place of the missing money.

The rooms, as we know, were bare and empty, not a thing in them to conceal anything; while carefully ex-

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amining the floors, he could see no evidence of a single board having been removed from its place.

There was a closet in the outer room, and one leading from the landing at the head of the stairs; but upon exploring these, he was confronted only by bare walls, empty drawers and shelves, and all festooned with cobwebs, and musty from dampness.

He descended to the lower room, only to find the same unpromising aspect there.

Under the stairs, however, he found a long, deep closet. Entering this he began to investigate. Like the others above, it was empty and bare, but at his feet he saw a trap-door in the floor.

Raising this, he saw another flight of stairs, leading, as he conjectured into the cellar.

It was rather late, he thought, to attempt to explore such a place that day, and he finally returned to the room where he had left Arthur to wait until morning.

He found him sitting as he had left him, sullen and despondent.

He looked up, however, with a defiant toss of his head and a muttered oath, as Louis entered.

"I supposed you had gone and left me to my fate," he said, after a moment.

"Oh, no; I intend to pass the night here with you. I do not intend to show myself in public until I know something definite about that money, and I shall make a thorough search of these premises for it."

"It will be a pity to have so much labor lost."

"It will not be labor lost," Louis returned. "I am sure that it is somewhere here. It is my belief that you came here to-night to remove it to a place of safety—perhaps to take it to some other country to deposit it where you could draw upon it without attracting suspicion."

"'Plato, thou reasonest well,'" was the sarcastic response, as the young man paused in these reflections.

Louis paid no attention to his ill-humor, but seating himself upon a chair, he deposited his revolver upon the floor beside him and began to inspect the package that Arthur was in the act of passing to him when he found himself confronted by the muzzle of Louis' weapon.

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It contained some fresh rolls, from which he began to feed himself, as he was hungry and faint after the excitement of recent events.

Having at length eaten sufficient to appease his appetite, he drew forward another chair for his feet and made himself as comfortable as circumstances would allow. In this position he succeeded in catching an occasional nap, and thus the night passed and the morning of a new day dawned.

Louis awoke at an early hour, and refreshing himself with some of the rolls left over from the previous night, stole as quietly as possible from the room, and began again his search for the lost treasure.

His first venture was to mount into the third story, but this was as bare as the rooms below.

He kept on to the attic, but there the dust upon the floors had not been disturbed by even so much as a footprint, and he knew that it would be useless to waste any time in looking about among the rafters and beams.

He then descended to the first floor again, where he removed the trap leading to the cellar.

He crept down the narrow stair-way, and found himself in a large, open cellar, running under the whole of that portion of the building.

Here he determined to examine every inch of ground to see if it had been disturbed; and every stone in the wall with the same end in view.

* * * * * * * * *

The moment the door was closed and locked after Louis, Arthur Aspinwall sprang from his couch, muttering a malediction upon his foe, and began to look wildly about him for some means of escape.

On two sides of him there were those impassable iron bars fastened into the floor at the bottom and running up in a beam above the ceiling. It was impossible ever to stir them, though he threw his whole weight against them, hoping that some of them might be loosened in that way.

But he found himself powerless in that direction. On the other two sides of his place of imprisonment, there

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were only bare walls that had been painted some neutral tint.

Suddenly his face lighted, as his eye caught the gleam of a substantial-looking knife and fork upon his table.

"I wonder if I could cut through this plastering, then whittle through the laths, thus making my way into another portion of the building, and escape in that way," he muttered.

He pounded upon the walls with his fist as if to ascertain what he would have to contend against; but it only gave forth a dull thud that did not appear very promising.

"If I could have time enough I believe I could do it," he murmured; "but if he should take a notion to deliver me up within a day or two, I should have all my labor for my pains. However, it will do no harm to try."

He pulled out his lounge from the wall and marked off a place to begin operations.

"If I could make a hole I could conceal the *débris* under the lounge, and he would never suspect my purpose; he is down in the cellar, and cannot hear me plainly, and," with a little derisive laugh, "he may hunt for his treasure until doomsday. Meanwhile I will not be idle; this kind of life is maddening me."

He fell to work at once; marked off a square which he thought would be large enough to allow him to creep through, and then began to cut into the plastering.

He soon found that it would not be so difficult as he had at first imagined; a couple of hours would suffice to take away the whole square.

This discovery so encouraged him that he stopped for a while to eat something, for he was very hungry.

His appetite was excellent, and he partook heartily of the food that he had brought for Louis.

"What an idiot he was!" he said to himself, while making his breakfast; "he might have done this very thing—work his way out and escaped me after all. Strange that he did not think of it! but, blast me! he, and whoever has helped him, has been cunning enough at their other trick."

If he could have known of another hole, not three feet

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from him, where Louis, not so idiotic after all, had himself labored for long, weary hours for his liberty, only to find himself coming out against a huge fireproof wall that extended from cellar to roof, his spirits would not have been so buoyant as they appeared to be over this brilliant (?) idea.

Having eaten all he wished, he resumed his labors and worked busily for two or three hours, taking care to keep all his rubbish in a compact pile, where he could hastily conceal it by wheeling the lounge back into place, if he should hear any one coming.

Midday came, and with it Louis, to strengthen himself for his afternoon's work with what remained of his rolls.

Everything in the room was apparently just as he had left it in the morning, while Arthur was lying at full length upon his couch, either asleep, or feigning to be so, he could not tell which.

He had not been encouraged by his own work that morning. He had not found a trace of anything to show that any one had been into the cellar for any unusual purpose; but he had not expected that success would attend him all at once, and he had no intention of relinquishing it until he had been, as he said, over every inch of ground.

He ate his meager dinner in silence, and then betook himself again to his work.

As soon as he had gone, Arthur sprang up to resume his own operations.

He had succeeded in removing all the plastering, and now began to work upon the laths.

This was not so easy, for they were tough, and his knife was dull. He tried his pocket-knife, but broke it cutting the first one, and was forced to go back to the other.

For more than an hour he toiled diligently, but his success was not encouraging.

His hands were lamed and blistered, but that was of no consequence compared with the object in view.

A slight noise in the room beyond startled him.

He paused, but could hear nothing. He was about to

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resume his work when he was sure that he heard some one cautiously inserting a key in the lock of his door.

He had not heard Louis come up stairs, and it was not like him to exercise so much care.

Perhaps it was the private detective, whom he imagined to be in league with him.

His heart bounded into his throat at the thought.

As quickly and as noiselessly as he could, he arose from his knees, brushed the lime from his clothing, and pushed the lounge back to its place, thus concealing the rubbish he had made.

The next moment the door swung open and silently on its hinges, pushed by some unseen force on the outside.

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## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### AN ASTONISHING STORY.

With bated breath and a strange sensation about his heart, Arthur stood still and watched, wondering at all the caution and hesitancy.

Another instant and it was explained.

Uttering a cry of astonishment and dismay, he sank down upon his lounge, white, trembling and horrified.

In the door-way, regarding him with equal amazement and confusion, stood Margaret Houghton, as if transfixed.

For a full minute she could neither move nor speak; then all at once the truth flashed upon her.

Louis had turned the tables upon his foe.

He was free and the wretch who had caused him so much suffering and trouble, had been cunningly secured; the real thief had been captured at last.

"Ah," she said, as soon as she could find her voice, "so the fox has fallen into his own trap."

"What do you mean? How came you here?" Arthur demanded, looking bewildered and wretched enough to have satisfied his bitterest enemy.

"You are surprised to see me, are you?" Margaret

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asked, coming forward into the room, and regarding him curiously.

She had recovered her self-possession somewhat, and now seemed to take in the situation, it must be confessed, with evident satisfaction.

"Of course, I am surprised. How do you happen to be here?" he reiterated.

"Where is Louis?" she asked, irrelevantly.

"What do I care where he is? And how on earth did you know he was here?" Arthur demanded.

"I have known or suspected it for some time," Margie answered, composedly.

"You, Margie?"

"Yes, I, Margie. But I shall be obliged to you if you will hereafter address me as Miss Houghton, if you must speak to me at all."

"How long have you known that Louis Dunbar was in this building?" he demanded.

"I have suspected it since one day when, sitting in my mother's carriage, I saw an old gentleman come out of the alley below and walk up the Rue de Blanc."

"What old gentleman?"

"A man with white hair and beard, and dressed in a long overcoat and tall black hat," and she pointed with a withering smile at those very articles of apparel which lay in a heap on the floor beside him, where he had thrown them.

Arthur groaned, and began to see light.

Too well he remembered the day she referred to, when he had been startled on going home from that place, to find Mrs. Houghton's carriage in that locality.

He had not seen Margaret, however, for she had concealed herself behind a curtain, and he had hoped that the carriage was empty.

"What made you think it was I?" he questioned.

"You had recently turned your ankle; you limped with your left foot; so did this old gentleman. I caught the gleam of his eyes as he passed; they had a familiar look, while the hand in which he carried his keys was not the hand of an old man."

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"Curse the luck! Why didn't you accuse me then forthwith?"

"Because I knew how cunning you were; I could not, of course, be quite sure that it was you, although several things had already conspired to make me mistrust that you had something to do with Louis' disappearance."

"Such as what?"

"The loss of the diamond from your sleeve-button, for one thing."

"How could that be?"

"Well, you lost it the very night that Louis disappeared."

"Yes; but that counts for nothing. I might have lost a hundred other things at the same time."

"True; but it counted for something when I found it."

"Did you find it?" he cried, with a start. "Where?"

Very slowly and distinctly she spoke now, and every word seemed to fall like a hammer on his brain.

"I found it in the folds of the draperies in the corner behind the *tête-à-tête,* where Louis and I sat on that night while we discussed our plans for the future, and where he also told me of his anxiety regarding the large amount of money in his office."

"Ha!"

"You begin to comprehend, I perceive," Margaret observed, with quiet irony.

Again Arthur groaned—too well he comprehended.

"When I found that diamond," Margaret resumed, "I knew, as well as if you had told me, that you had been concealed behind those draperies, that you must have heard every word of our conversation. I knew you had hated Louis for long years, and that once you had done him a great wrong; why, then, would you hesitate to do him another injury? I asked myself, and I immediately began to suspect you of knowing something about the mystery which so distressed us. I began to watch you, to weigh all your words and actions, and my suspicions were almost confirmed when I recognized you through this disguise. I had seen you come out of this building, and I naturally wondered what possible

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interest you could have in this locality, and in these supposed empty buildings.

"Do you remember," she continued, growing excited, as she rehearsed the story to him, "that stormy evening when we played euchre at home, how I would not play with you? I played against you, and I told you I was playing against you with all my might. I meant far more than I appeared to at the time, for I was playing a desperate game against you. Then, all at once, I began to cultivate your society. Oh, how it went against me. How a hated myself for my duplicity; but I had a secret to worm out of you."

"Aha, that was your game, then," interrupted Arthur, growing white to his lips as he realized how he had being fooled.

"Yes; do you suppose I would have tolerated your company for one moment after what you had said regarding my betrothed husband, if I had not been impelled by a powerful motive?"

"But how, under heavens, did you contrive to get into this building?" questioned Arthur, growing interested in this thrilling account in spite of his own desperate situation.

"Simply by the use of two keys," and she held them up before his astonished eyes; keys precisely like those he had possessed until compelled to give them up to Louis.

"Where did you get them?" he asked, breathlessly.

"I had them made."

"How?"

"I have already remarked that I began to cultivate your society, and that I had a powerful motive in so doing."

"Yes," he interrupted, bitterly, "you led me on, you tempted me, making believe you cared for me, only to betray me, when I loved you to idolatry."

She drew herself up haughtily.

"I never gave you the slightest encouragement to speak of love to me. I always repelled you whenever you attempted it," she said, coldly. "I confess that for a time, I assumed a friendliness which I did not feel, and

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it was not an easy thing to do, either, simply to accomplish a purpose."

"What purpose?"

"That of getting possession of your keys to this building."

He started to his feet, looking almost wild.

"But you never succeeded; they have never been out of my possession for even one hour," he cried, excitedly.

"No; but I took an impression of them!"

He staggered back, striking his forehead with his hand as he seemed to recall something.

"Then that was all pretense—your fascination for coins and curious keys?" he said.

"No, not wholly; I have a passion for old coins. It was a hoax about the keys though. I thought, perhaps, I could entice you to hand over what you had to me, and in that way I could get an impression of the two that I wanted."

"But you did not catch me that way," he retorted.

"No," she returned, regarding him with a curious expression.

"For Heaven's sake, don't sit there and look at me in that way. You have triumphed, it seems, and I should like to know just how you did it."

"Surely, you have not forgotten all that occurred the day of the *fête* when I was your guest."

"No!" the young man excitedly cried, light at last beginning to break in upon his mind.

"Well, I went there for a purpose that day, and I accomplished it."

"I see," said Arthur, with a crest-fallen air, "your weariness was all a pretense; you had seen those keys when I showed you the inside of my desk; you pretended that you needed rest and quiet, and while we all thought you sleeping, you improved your time by rummaging and taking an impression of those keys. An honorable return, surely, for one's hospitality," he concluded, satirically.

She faced him with flashing eyes.

"Do you presume to talk about an honorable return

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for hospitality," she cried, indignantly, "you who had the meanness to conceal yourself behind the draperies in a lady's parlor—after having been courteously received as her guest for many months—and listen to a conversation that was purely confidential, almost sacred; and then, taking advantage of what you had thus learned, go forth and commit a crime to ruin the man whom she loved more than her own life. Really, Mr. Aspinwall, you need coaching in the science of discrimination," she concluded, with biting sarcasm.

"Yes, I did 'rummage' as you express it," she went on after a moment of thought, "and I felt justified in so doing. I believed that the fate of one, dearer to me than all the world besides, depended upon the use of that hour spent in your room. I knew I was upon the right trail, for, before lunch, while you were out, I had been in your closet and seen protruding from one of your trunks, a few gray hairs, and knew as well as I did later when I saw the whole, that your disguise was there. But about the keys: I was sure that by using a little strategy I could take their impression—I could have others made, and then I could come and see for myself what interested you so in this building. Doubtless you wonder why I did not confide in my father and save myself all this trouble and perhaps danger. It was because I wished to do you no wrong in the estimation of others. If my suspicions, regarding your agency in this crime, should prove to be incorrect, no one would be the wiser, you would not be injured in any way, nor be wounded by what I had done. If, on the other hand, they proved to be true, then, I reasoned, it would be a very easy matter to bring you to justice."

"Go on—pray go on; I am deeply interested and would like to hear the whole of this interesting story," Arthur said, bitterly, as she paused for a moment.

"I do not object to telling it," Margaret returned, with a slight smile, "it may serve to show you what a woman's cunning and intuition can sometimes outwit a villain's most desperate schemes."

"You are getting complimentary as you proceed, Miss Houghton!" he interrupted, angrily.

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"I am simply stating facts. But to return to my subject: Left alone in your room, I went directly to your desk, where I found the keys I had been wanting to get possession of for so long, together with wax and tapers, and it was the work of but a few moments to get impressions of them both. I confess that I felt very uncomfortable to be thus playing the part of a spy and prying into your affairs, and nothing but sternest necessity could have tempted me to violate my sense of honor in that way."

"Your apology comes rather late in the day to be of much account," sneered Arthur.

"The next day," she resumed, without heeding his interruption, "I took my impressions to a locksmith, had keys made, and a few evenings later I came hither between eight and nine o'clock to test them and the truth of my suspicions regarding you."

"You possess courage as well as strategy, Miss Houghton," Arthur again interrupted.

"I would have been willing to encounter even more than I did if I had supposed I was going to save Louis Dunbar from your malignity. I do not think I really expected to find him here; I hoped to find some clew that would lead to his discovery. But I did expect to find some trace of the missing money and believed that a revelation of everything would follow if I did.

"But when I entered this room, and found him alive and well, even though a prisoner behind those dreadful bars, oh!"—and Margaret heaved a deep sigh at the remembrance of the shock she had sustained—"no one can ever know, and I never can tell, what my sensations were.

"Of course, I could not release him then, for I had no key to that ponderous padlock; but, after consulting with him, we arranged that. So yesterday morning I went out to a hardware store——"

"Ha-a-a!"

"Yes," Margaret said, a little smile of triumph flitting over her face; I had just purchased a saw and file suitable for working upon iron, and concealed them about my person, when you met me at the door."

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"Oh, what a dolt I have been!" cried her listener, wildly. "I understand it all now—your capriciousness, playing fast and loose with me—your queer remarks, which seemed to imply so much, and yet nothing at all—the sudden change in your dress, and your strange gayety and vivacity yesterday. What a dupe you have made of me from beginning to end!"

"I suppose the knowledge cannot be very gratifying to your feelings," Margaret asserted; "but I had to do it, nevertheless. Yes, I planned the ride yesterday afternoon, without the slightest intention of accompanying you——"

"Then your headache was all sham. I supposed Miss Margaret Houghton to be above the meanness of lying," snapped Arthur, angrily.

"And so I am," Margaret returned, with dignity. "I have told no falsehoods—not one; I have simply employed strategy that was perfectly justifiable. My headache was no sham; it was terribly real, proceeding from nervousness, lest any of my plans should fail. But as soon as I had sent you and mamma, and Floy Arnold off on your excursion to Buttes Chamont——"

"And Floy Arnold was only a decoy, then!" groaned Arthur.

"Of course! I knew that neither you nor mamma would go and leave me at home, believing me to be ill, unless you stood committed to accompany some one else, and Floy proved to be a very convenient decoy. I could not carry out my plans unless you were out of the way, and something seemed to make me feel that I must work quickly. As soon as you were gone I came directly here to bring the file and saw, and I was also inspired to bring Louis papa's revolver."

"Ah! that was Mr. Houghton's revolver, then?"

"Yes; it was a good thing, my bringing it, for it seems that Louis has made good use of it," Margaret replied, significantly.

Arthur swore roundly at this reference to his uncomfortable situation.

"You are forgetting your manners, Mr. Aspinwall," Margaret said, reprovingly. "I do not think it is exactly

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kind to exult over a fallen foe, but I must confess that it affords me infinite satisfaction to find you here, when I believed you had left the city. I should not have come here to-day, for Louis told me not to venture again for a few days, but for what you said last night about going away. I felt that it would be safe under those circumstances, and I wanted to ascertain how my hero was getting along, and perhaps aid him a little in his work. Ah! I think he must be coming now!" she concluded, as a step was heard upon the stairs.

The next moment Louis entered the room.

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## CHAPTER XL.

### THE SECRET PANEL.

"Margie!" Louis exclaimed in amazement, and glancing anxiously from her to his captive, as if he feared she might have suffered some harm in coming near him.

She sprang toward him with outstretched hands, her face radiant with happiness.

"Oh, Louis!" she cried, " what delight to see you free once more!—to know that you are safe!"

He laid down his revolver and candle, and taking her hands in his, drew her gently out of the room and away from those lowering, malicious eyes that were watching their every movement; and Arthur Aspinwall, almost maddened by the sight of their mutual joy, threw himself, with a groan of despair, at full length upon his lounge and hid his face in his hands.

"How happened you to come here again to-day?" Louis asked, as, for the first time in long weeks, he folded his betrothed in a fond embrace.

She explained to him that Arthur had mentioned that he might be away from Paris for a few days, and her father having heard that he had gone, she thought she might come to him with safety, and perhaps help him somewhat in the use of the saw and file.

"What a faithful little woman!" Louis said, while he touched his lips reverently to her white forehead; "but

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did you imagine I would allow these tender hands to do such rough work?"

"It would not hurt them; I could have filed while you sawed—anything to help you out of that dreadful place."

Then he related all that had occurred—how he had compelled Arthur to release him, and then had driven him, at the muzzle of the weapon, into captivity in his place.

"But the money, dear," he said, despondingly, in conclusion, "I cannot find. I have tried in vain to make him confess where it is, and I have looked the building over thoroughly, with no result. I could have taken my oath that it was somewhere here, for I have heard him prowling about in this room and below many a time."

"There is a closet—is there anything in it?" Margaret asked, glancing toward it.

"No; absolutely nothing, save dust and cobwebs."

"Are there no boards loosened anywhere in the floors?"

"Not one; I have examined everywhere."

Margaret stood thinking a moment, while her eyes wandered critically all about the room.

Suddenly she started and sprang away from him.

"See here, Louis, the room is wainscoted all around!" she cried, a brilliant flush suffusing her face. "You know," she went on, eagerly, "how much we have read about sliding panels and secret closets in the wainscoting of old houses? Perhaps we may find one here;" and she began rapping upon each panel with which the room was sheathed for about three feet from the floor.

The wood was of chestnut, and each panel was set into a molding something like the panel of a common door.

Louis smiled at her suggestion, and shook his head.

"You will find more of such things in novels than anywhere else," he remarked, skeptically.

"You need not laugh at the idea," she retorted, gayly, "for, truly, I saw one in an old manor-house where we visited for a little while in England. Come, dear, help me sound these panels; begin where you stand and work around toward me; it can do no harm to try, and who knows what may come of it?"

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Louis was standing by the mantel—a marble one, fastened above the fire-place, and extending each side of it to the wainscoting.

He turned slowly to obey Margaret's request, but with an air that plainly indicated no faith in and no hope of making any discovery.

He rapped upon the panel nearest the fire-place on the right of it, and instantly it gave forth a hollow sound.

"Margie," he cried, astonished, "I will never doubt a woman's intuition again—there is an empty space behind this panel."

"Oh, Louis, are you sure?" she said, springing toward him.

"Yes," he replied, gravely; "but I see no way to get into it without breaking it in."

"There must be a secret spring somewhere. Let us look for it," said Margaret, eagerly.

But with all their searching none could be found; the board seemed to be built firmly into its place.

"There was a spring to the one I saw in England," said Margaret, looking disappointed.

"Well, spring or no spring, I am going to know what is behind it," Louis asserted, resolutely, and repaired to the other room to get his file.

He was so intent upon his purpose he did not observe Arthur. If he had done so he would have observed that he was sitting erect, and in an attitude that would indicate intent listening.

Returning with his file, Louis inserted the point of it at the base of the panel between it and the molding, and tried to pry it from its place.

To the infinite surprise of both, it at once slid noiselessly upward, showing that pressure at the bottom would have accomplished what they wished, while a small closet, containing a couple of shelves, was revealed to their eager eyes.

"Oh," exclaimed Margaret, as she bent down to look within it.

Alas, it was empty. Nothing but the dust of many years was there to reward them for their search.

"I was so sure we had found it," said the young girl, growing pale from disapointment.

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Louis also was greatly tried; he began to fear that he might not find the money after all.

"Perhaps," he said, after a moment of silence, and trying to speak hopefully, "there may be a mate to this closet on the other side of the fire-place."

"Ah, yes; strange I did not think of that; let us look quickly," Margaret assented, eagerly.

"There is!" Louis declared, after tapping upon the panel, while his eyes grew large and intensely black with excitement.

He tried to raise it the same as he had raised the other, but it resisted all his efforts.

Margaret was intensely excited.

"It is there, I am sure it is there," she said.

"Dunbar," called a voice from the other room.

"Well," answered Louis, going to the door.

His heart had leaped with sudden hope at the call.

Arthur Aspinwall was standing close to the bars of his prison, his face ashen, his eyes wild, while he shivered as if with cold.

"I have heard what you were doing, and it is all up with me," he said, in a strained, unnatural voice; "you have conquered; you have found where the money is hidden, and I may as well tell you the rest. I know you will break in that panel if I do not give you the key, so here it is."

He tossed him a bit of steel about two and a half inches in length, very thin and narrow, and cut in a peculiar way at one end.

"Insert that in a little slot that you will find in the molding at the bottom of the panel, and you are all right. When I hired this place the landloard revealed the secret to me in case I should wish to store anything valuable there."

He turned away again after saying this; sank upon the couch, and dropped his head upon his hands.

Louis stooped and grasped that precious bit of steel with trembling fingers.

His face was deadly white, and he staggered back into the other room almost like a drunken man.

At last! at last his weary search, his long waiting and anxiety were over.

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Once more he could go forth and take his place in the world, an honorable and respected man.

He had to wait a moment before inserting the little key in its lock, for there was a blur before his eyes, and his hand shook like a leaf.

But it soon passed; his eyes grew clear, his hand steady.

The key was in the lock; there was a little click as he turned it, and, obedient to the upward pressure, this panel also slid smoothly upward in its grooves, as if controlled by weights and pulleys.

Margaret's quick eyes caught sight of something within, and she uttered a cry of joy.

Louis put in his hand and drew forth a small tin box about twelve inches square.

It was not locked; the lid was held in place only by a small hasp.

He lifted it, and lo! the box was full of crisp, fresh bank-notes and neatly arranged piles of glittering gold. He could not say one word, for the sight all but unmanned him; his strong frame trembled, his lips quivered, and his broad chest heaved with the heavy throbbings of his grateful heart; he could only turn and look straight into the uplifted eyes of his betrothed, knowing full well that she would understand his emotion, and be in sympathy with it.

She crept close to his side and clasped her trembling hands about his arm.

"Louis, you are saved!—everything will be all right now," she breathed.

"Yes; thank God!" he answered, reverently, though his tone was husky from excessive agitation.

"Is it all there?" she whispered.

"Very nearly, if not quite all, I should judge," he replied. "I presume he would not dare to use it very freely here."

"How very fortunate we have been! Oh! if I had been a day later in coming to you!—I tremble to think of the result," Margaret said with a shiver.

Louis smiled, though there were tears in his eyes.

"It was all wisely ordered, dear," he said, softly; then continued: "Ah! but this was very cunningly hidden;

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the whole thing has been most artfully planned and carried out from the beginning, and but for your keen intuition and brave efforts, it might have been a long time before I could have been liberated, if indeed I ever was."

"Why do you say that?—have you learned anything new regarding his plans?" asked Margaret, indicating Arthur by a movement of her head.

"Yes. he came here last night, bringing a large basketful of provisions, and informed me that he was about to leave Paris for a while; he even confessed that he was intending to take this money out of the country in order to invest it where he could draw from it as he chose. In that event it is doubtful if it ever could have been recovered. He also told me that if I would not take an oath to leave the country, and hide in some remote place, he should have me confined in some private mad-house, upon his return, where I could never trouble him again."

"Oh, Louis, how horrible!"

"So you can see," he resumed, "that your thoughtfulness in bringing me your father's revolver has saved me from a dreadful fate, and the treasure from being lost forever to its rightful owners."

"How thankful I am," Margaret breathed, leaning her forehead against her lover's shoulder, while tears of gratitude rolled over her white cheeks.

Louis regarded her with tender concern.

"The excitement is proving too much for you, my darling," he said, "you are nearly exhausted by it."

"I am so glad and so thankful that it makes me weak," she said, looking up with a faint smile; but he saw that she was very much unnerved.

"Come into the other room and rest a few minutes," he said, "and then we will go home."

"Oh, Louis, will you go with me now?" she asked, eagerly.

"Yes; I feel that I can show myself in the world now and be regarded as an honorable man," he answered, drawing his fine figure erect, a flush of pride on his cheeks, the light of a new hope in his eyes.

He led Margaret to the other room and made her sit down, while he gathered together what few things be-

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longed to him, and made himself ready to leave the place where he had spent so many wretched days.

He put his revolver and tools, which Margaret had obtained for him, into the basket, in which Arthur had brought his provisions, then placing the box of gold and notes in it, he carefully covered the whole with several papers.

"It will attract less attention if I carry it in the basket," he explained to Margaret, who was watching him intently.

Arthur looked white and miserable as he, too, noted these preparations for their departure.

"What am I to expect now?" he asked, moodily.

Louis went up to him and regarded him gravely, while there was also a regretful look in his fine eyes.

"Mr. Aspinwall," he said, kindly, but speaking very firmly, "as far as I am personally concerned, I bear you no ill-will, and I would not lift my hand against you in retaliation or revenge; but I have been placed in a very questionable position before the world; my good name must be vindicated, my honor re-established. If this could be done without the agency of the law, and a public investigation of the mystery which for a time agitated all Paris, I should be very glad to have it so, if by that means you would learn a lesson, and be persuaded never to commit crime again. However, I will do what I can for you—to shield you from open disgrace and lighten your punishment."

"Pshaw! do you expect me to believe such balderdash as that?" cried the listener, passionately. "I believe you hate me as heartily as I do you, and that you will exult in turning me over to the authorities, and then pocket the generous reward offered for the apprehension of the thief and the restoration of the money, with a chuckle over my wretched fate."

"You are much mistaken," Louis replied, quietly. "I do not hate you; I have never hated you; I would gladly have been your friend from the first. As for the reward offered for the restoration of this money and the apprehension of the robber, I shall not touch so much as a single sou of it. All I desire is to have my good name and the confidence of the company restored to me. I

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cannot, of course, force you to believe all this; but for the sake of your uncle, Mr. Forest, for whom I have learned to feel a strong regard, if there's any way by which I can arrange with the company so as to avoid a public exposure and imprisonment for you—if I can be satisfactorily reinstated without criminating you, I will do it."

"Let me go, then, at once," urged Arthur, eagerly.

"And thus allow suspicion of a great wrong to rest upon me as long as I live," returned Louis, with a curl of his lips and a flash from his eyes. "No, sir."

"I will make a confession in full, as I told you before," persisted the unprincipled man.

Louis shook his head resolutely.

"I should be arrested at once as your accomplice—should be regarded as aiding and abetting you in your crime. No; I shall make a full statement of the affair to my company, and leave the matter with them; but, for your uncle's sake, and with the hope that you may become a better man, I promise to use my influence for you. Come, Margie."

Arthur sank abjectly on the floor, groaning aloud in his misery. He was not dying so "game" after all.

Louis led Margaret from the room, securely locking the door after him, and then together they passed forever out of the building, and Louis stood once more a free man beneath the beautiful blue vault of heaven.

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## CHAPTER XLI.

### THE DIRECTORS AMAZED.

"I shall go straight through this alley to the Rue Castiglione," Louis said to Margaret, as they stepped into the narrow street, "the distance is not great, and we shall not attract attention this way. I can get a carriage for you there, and send you comfortably home."

"Louis, I shall go to the office with you—you may need my testimony, you know."

"I hope that the company will accept my explanation of the affair without adopting any legal proceedings, for

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I dislike, exceedingly, the thought of dragging you before the public."

Margaret glanced up at him. His face was very pale and wore an anxious expression.

"I shall go with you," she repeated, decidedly; and he made no further objection.

They walked on silently and swiftly, both feeling a desire to get the precious contents of that basket into a place of safety as soon as possible.

They reached the end of the alley, turned the corner to the left, and were at the door of the office.

The outer door was open, and the young couple entered.

Louis hesitated a moment as his hand touched the knob upon the inner door, and Margaret could see that he was greatly agitated.

But it was only for an instant—the next he had entered that familiar room, followed by his faithful betrothed.

There was no one in this outer office, the clerk had evidently just gone out, and for a few moments only, as his desk was littered with papers and letters.

Louis passed with a rapid step across the room to the inner office, where the cashier was sitting before his desk busily engaged in making up some accounts.

He glanced up with an impatient air, as Louis entered, as if annoyed by the interruption.

But instantly a look of astonishment spread over his face.

It grew to one of horror, as if he almost believed himself confronted by a disembodied spirit.

His pen dropped from his nerveless fingers, and he staggered weakly to his feet.

*"Mon Dieu! Dunbar!"* he cried, in a hollow voice.

"Yes, it is Dunbar, and not his ghost, as I see you are half inclined to believe," Louis said, putting down his basket, and holding out his shaking hand to his old comrade.

The man took it mechanically, but still regarded him with a sort of dazed air.

"We—I—thought you must be—dead," he stammered, at last.

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"Then you did not believe that I had absconded with the company's money?" Louis questioned.

"Dunbar—if it is indeed you, as I am half inclined to doubt," began the young man, shaking himself, as if to arouse his benumbed faculties—"I knew you were as true as steel. *I* never believed for a moment that you played any trick upon us."

"Then others believed it if you did not?" quickly returned Louis, with a pained quiver in his voice as he noticed the emphasis upon the pronoun.

"Well," he answered, flushing, "of course people will surmise all sorts of things when a man disappears as you did and a lot of money with him; but I knew you too well to believe anything of the kind. I was confident that here had been foul play in the matter."

"Thanks. There *has* been foul play," Louis answered, deeply hurt that the company, or any member of it, should have doubted his integrity.

"Well, I never was more glad to greet any one," said the cashier, heartily shaking the hand he still held. "But come, tell me how it was—give an account of your adventure, for an adventure I am sure you must have had. Ah! pardon," he continued, as he caught sight of Margaret, who had remained in the background.

"Miss Houghton, Mons. Froque," Louis said, presenting Margaret to him.

They saluted each other in mutual recognition, and then the polite Frenchman sprang to get a chair for the young lady, after which he again turned eagerly to Louis for an explanation of his startling appearance.

"I must not tell you anything—I cannot rest," Louis said, as he uncovered his basket and removed the little tin trunk from it, "until this money has been counted and safely lodged in the bank."

"The money! the money!" almost shrieked the excited cashier. "Have you brought the money back also? Where did you get it? Ah! how——"

He could not go on.

A hundred thoughts flashed with lightning rapidity through his mind at this startling intelligence; and for the first time since Louis' strange disappearance, something like a doubt of his integrity disturbed him.

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Louis saw it. He was as keenly sensitive as a woman to feel this mistrust, and involuntarily his lip curled.

"If I had been dishonest enough to run away with it, it is not likely that I should bring it back myself, even if I had repented of the deed. But come," Louis added, with nervous impatience, "lock that door, pull down the shades. The money must be counted. I must know how much is missing."

He himself strode to the door and locked it, while the excited cashier, drew the shades before the windows and the half-glass partitions that separated the inner from the outer offices.

Louis then put his precious burden upon the desk, threw back the lid, and revealed the treasure within.

Mons. Froque grew white as death as he looked upon it.

"Ah, this is wonderful, wonderful!" he murmured.

"Count," Louis commanded, while he lifted the crisp notes out for himself and pushed the gold coins toward the cashier.

For a long time there was not a sound heard in that room save the rattling of paper and the musical chink of gold.

People came into the outer room, tried the door leading into the inner office, and finding it locked, wondered what private business was being transacted within. But no attention was paid to them, and they were obliged to wait, or go about other affairs, as they saw fit.

"The bills are all here!" Louis at last said, as he laid the last package down; "the villain evidently did not dare to pass them, fearing their numbers had been taken and he would thus be detected. How does the coin come out?"

The cashier had not finished his counting and did not answer; he simply pushed a heap of the gold toward Louis, motioning him to assist him in his work, and another silence of ten or fifteen minutes ensued.

At last it was finished.

"How much is missing?" Louis asked, with dry lips and a husky voice, when Mons. Froque had footed up the different amounts.

"Less than a thousand francs."

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"Thank Heaven! That amount can easily be replaced, and the interest of the whole be added to it," responded Louis, fervently.

"Yes, yes. But now tell me about it—I am boiling over with curiosity," urged the cashier.

"Not yet. We must send this money to the bank; it must never remain in this office another night. After that there will be time enough for my story," Louis replied while he hastily returned it to the tin box.

"I will take it myself," said Mons. Froque, after a moment spent in thought.

He put on his overcoat, donned his hat, and taking up the box, left the room.

In the outer office he stopped to confer a moment with the clerk, who had returned soon after Louis had entered, and who was as much astonished to learn of his presence as the cashier had been by his sudden appearance; while, judging from the glances of suspicion directed toward the inner office, and the strict watch kept upon its door while Mons. Froque was away, he had not the utmost confidence in the man who had been so long and strangely absent.

At the same time messages went thrilling along the wires, summoning the directors and other members of the company for an immediate investigation of the matter.

Louis knew very well as soon as the door closed after the cashier, that he was to be held a prisoner in that room until an examination of his statements had been held.

But this did not disturb him; he had expected it, and was as anxious as any one could be to have the mystery explained, and his own position and honor re-established.

"How long he is!" Margaret remarked, uneasily, when a half-hour had elapsed and Mons. Froque did not return.

"Yes; it will take some time to deposit the money, for, of course, it will have to be counted again at the bank."

At last there came the sound of many footsteps in the room without.

The door was then thrown open, and Mons. Froque,

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accompanied by four other gentlemen, made his appearance.

Louis arose to receive them, and was greeted with profuse expressions of delight over the fact of his safe return and the restoration of the money.

The cashier explained that he had immediately telephoned for the gentlemen upon leaving for the bank, thinking that time would thus be saved if a number of the directors could hear his story at the same time.

This would have given Louis no uneasiness, neither would he have suspected the motives of Mons. Froque, if his quick glance had not caught sight of an armed policeman in the other room as the gentlemen entered. He knew that the cashier had some misgivings still, and had determined to secure his arrest if his story should not prove satisfactory in all points.

But he related all that had occurred upon the night of his disappearance, and described the subsequent events.

At first the directors were inclined to doubt his story; but as it progressed, all suspicions of its veracity disappeared. Long before Louis had finished, they began to realize how unjust they had been to the man who had suffered so much. As Louis finished his narrative, one of the directors stepped forward and grasped him cordially by the hand.

"If there has been a doubt in any of our minds, it has vanished. Now, about the bird that you have captured; may we detain you here still longer while we send an officer after him, and learn what he has to say for himself?"

"Certainly; it is my wish that this affair be settled as soon as possible. But may I ask as a personal favor that you deal leniently with him?"

The gentlemen regarded Louis with astonishment as he made this request.

"I will gladly make up the amount that has been taken," Louis continued, "also the interest on the whole for the time that it has been lying idle; and—if it could be possible to persuade you not to arraign him for public trial—if we could settle this privately——"

"This is certainly a most singular request," interrupted one of his hearers, sternly. "The man has been guilty of

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a two-fold crime. One would suppose, from what you have suffered at his hands, that you would deem the severest sentence that could be pronounced upon him insufficient to atone for your injuries."

"He is one of my countrymen," urged Louis. "We were schoolmates in our youth, and the peculiar circumstances under which he has recently labored may have made the temptation greater than it would otherwise have been. He has always been accustomed to every luxury, but recently has lost both parents, and with them a large fortune, which all his life he has expected would be his upon their death. He found himself in a strange country, without even money enough to return to his native land, except what was given to him by a friend; so you perceive he was sorely tempted."

The directors consulted together for a few moments and grew considerably excited while discussing the matter. They did not appear to be in favor of granting the request, even if it was in their power to do so, which some of them doubted.

"We cannot decide that question now, Mr. Dunbar," one at length remarked; "but," with a smile, "there is another upon which we are all agreed—the large reward offered for the recovery of the money and the apprehension of the thief is yours."

Louis flushed deepest crimson.

He had said he would not touch so much as a sou of the promised reward, and he had not intended to do so.

But, after thinking deeply for a moment, he looked up with a smile, saying:

"Gentlemen, to show you how much in earnest I am regarding this matter, if you will grant my request and hush this affair as much as possible, allowing my countryman to go free—he is young, and upon this act may depend his salvation—I will cheerfully resign all claim to the reward."

"But he may do the same thing again to some one else."

"No, no!" said Louis. "We will exact a pledge from him that he will heed the lesson and strive to become an honorable man. I do not believe he will ever become a thief again."

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"You are more fit to be an abbe than a business man, Mons. Dunbar; but we cannot promise."

And Louis was obliged to let the matter rest for the present.

The policeman that he had seen outside was dispatched with one of the clerks to conduct Arthur to the office, and after consulting with Margaret a moment, Louis asked permission to send a message to Mr. Houghton requesting his presense, also.

This being granted, the party fell into social converse while waiting for the appearance of Arthur.

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## CHAPTER XLII.

### AN INTERESTED MAN.

As soon as Louis and Margaret left the building after finding the gold, Arthur commenced with renewed vigor to dig away at the hole he was making in the wall.

It was astonishing to see with what energy the usually indolent, pleasure-seeking young man toiled. The knife was dull, and it was slow, hard work.

At last, however, he had two laths cut away, then something confronted him for which he was wholly unprepared. Behind that lathing there was a solid brick wall—a fire-proof wall!

He sank down upon the floor with a groan, all hope crushed out of his heart.

He lay there in a crouching attitude for some time, then he glanced up eagerly at the other side of his prison—the rear side.

There might not be any wall upon that side.

His table stood in the corner; he sprang up and moved it out, and in doing so discovered another hole not quite the size of the one on which he had been at work.

"Ah! the diamond-worker who had owned the shop in the years gone by had seen to it that his treasures should be carefully guarded; while Louis had not, after all, been such a fool as he had at first supposed. He, too, had tried to escape in the same way, and been baffled by that impassable barrier.

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But what had he done with the *débris?*

The safe!

He sprang toward it.

Yes, it was half full of lime and broken laths.

He threw himself upon his couch with an oath, that ended in a groan of despair.

Must he stay there and be run down like a rat in a trap?—be arrested like any common thief—be tried and condemned to a fate that to him would be worse than death.

His eye caught the gleam of his pocket knife, which he had thrown upon the floor after breaking it upon those tough laths, and he started, while a shiver ran through his frame.

It had been very sharp, and a steady, determined stroke across an artery, even with that broken blade, would place him beyond all fear of man or the law.

Yes, all fear of man!

Dare he do it? Had he courage and nerve to make that fatal stroke?

He grew faint and sick; there came a sudden shock, a strong revulsion at the thought.

A blur fell before his eyes; a ringing, as of discordant bells, was in his ears; a cold sweat started out upon his forehead. and his heart beat with heavy throbs.

No, he had not the nerve; for, away back in the past, when he was a little child and had knelt at his mother's knees to be taught to lisp his childish prayers, there had been instilled into his tender mind the fear of God, and accountability to Him.

He might succeed in escaping the bar of human justice by becoming a suicide, but he knew it would only be to find himself before the bar of God to be judged—yes, and condemned—for all eternity.

His mother had been an amiable, Christian woman, and he had loved her as well as his selfish, exacting, arrogant nature would permit him to love any one. She had been faithful to him, instructing him, as many another mother had done her boy, and reaping no return during life; but he knew that all her life she had prayed to the God in whom she believed for him, and that with her latest breath she had spoken his name, and pleaded that she

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might be allowed to meet him by and by in the upper world to which she was going.

She was gone; but, though dead, she yet seemed to speak to him, and in the awful silence of that room, where for a moment the mad thought of taking his own life had come to him, he seemed to feel her presence, while a vision of his past arose before him.

What had it amounted to?

He had lived for himself alone, for the gratification of his whims and caprices, making everything subservient to his own selfish desires.

He had plotted and intrigued from his earliest boyhood to gain his own ends; he had allowed nothing to stand in his way, if trickery, or meanness, or deceit would avail. He had never, that he could remember, done a noble act, performed a really good deed, or denied himself for the sake of another.

He had sown the wind—was he about to reap the whirlwind?

For the first time in his life he stood face to face with his own soul and saw it as it was, realizing how he had warped, marred, and misused that God-given treasure.

Was it too late to redeem himself?

He groaned aloud in mental agony at the thought.

Yes, he thought, it was too late, for soon the world would know him as he was, and he would be branded for all time with a mark which nothing could ever efface.

Suddenly he heard a noise below! Some one was coming. Was it Louis returning, or had he sent a gendarme to arrest him?

In a few moments a key was inserted in the lock, the door was thrown open, and two men entered, one of them a gendarme.

"Why are you here?" Arthur questioned, hoarsely.

"You are wanted, monsieur," was the brief reply, as the gendarme produced his key to his prison and unlocked it, bidding him to come forth and prepare to go with them, and he knew then that Louis had given him up to justice.

With a face that was perfectly ashen, he obeyed the command, and, each taking him by the arm, they led him

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from the building, into the Rue de Blanc, where there was a carriage waiting.

This they entered, and were driven rapidly away. Arriving at the office where they were expected, the prisoner was led directlv into the inner room, where the door was immediately locked, and the key withdrawn.

Here he found those whom we have already mentioned, while during the absence of the officer and the clerk, Mr. and Mrs. Houghton had arrived, and to the astonishment of Margaret and Louis, they were accompanied by Mr. Forest.

This gentleman had made his appearance in Mrs. Houghton's parlor soon after Margaret went out upon her visit to Louis. Almost his first inquiry was regarding his nephew.

Mrs. Houghton, of course, could tell him nothing except that he had mentioned his intention of leaving Paris for a few days.

Mr. Forest appeared surprised and troubled by this intelligence. Then he asked for news of Louis Dunbar.

"Poor Louis! Have you not heard the sad news regarding him?" asked Mrs. Houghton, surprised.

"Sad news, madam! Great heavens! has anything happened to him?" Mr. Forest exclaimed, greatly agitated.

"Yes; he suddenly disappeared shortly after you left Paris, and nothing has been heard of him since."

"Nothing? Is there no clew—nothing to lead any one to suspect what has become of him?"

"No; and that is not all——"

"Tell me quickly!" interrupted Mr. Forest, growing pale, and actually trembling with apprehension.

"A large amount of money—forty thousand dollars—disappeared with him.

"Impossible!"

"It is true, my friend," said Mrs. Houghton, sadly, although she wondered somewhat at his excitement over the matter.

"Do they say that he took it and—ran away?" demanded her companion, hoarsely.

"Some suspect him of being the defaulter; but——"

"NEVER! I would stake my life upon his integrity."

"So would we," answered Mrs. Houghton, wiping a

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tear from her eye; "but whatever has become of him—whatever became of the money, no one has been able to learn as yet. The whole affair is a deep mystery."

"Ah, madam, you unnerve me. He was such a noble young man. There was nothing but truth in his eye, honor and manliness in his countenance and bearing. Begin at the beginning and tell me the whole story," Mr. Forest begged, with emotion.

Mrs. Houghton complied, and rehearsed what is so familiar to us all; but she was not quite through, when her husband entered the room, looking flurried and anxious.

"What is it, Wallace?" she asked, rising hastily and going forward to meet him.

Her first thought was always for Margaret.

"Where is Margaret?" he asked, regarding her earnestly.

"She went out some time ago—yes, a long time ago," she replied with a start, as glancing at the clock, she saw how late it was. "Has anything happened to her?"

"No, dear; I do not think any harm has happened to her," he replied, reassuringly; "but I have a note from her, asking me to come to the office of the telephone company immediately, and bring you with me."

"How strange? What can it mean?"

"We will not stop to conjecture," Mr. Houghton said; "we must go to her without delay."

Mrs. Houghton led him forward to greet Mr. Forest, and then hastened from the room to prepare to go to Margaret.

In less than ten minutes she was ready and back again in the parlor, and at her almost impatient, "I am ready, Wallace," Mr. Houghton arose and excused himself.

"I will accompany you, if I may be permitted," Mr. Forest said, rising also. "If it is anything connected with the affair that your wife has just been telling me about, I am as much interested as anybody."

They wondered at his request, for they knew that he had met Louis but a very few times, and was almost a stranger to him.

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## CHAPTER XLIII.

### LOUIS PLEADS FOR ARTHUR.

When the door opened, and Mr. and Mrs. Houghton entered the telephone office Margaret sprang forward to meet them with a glad cry.

She seized her mother's hands, and Mrs. Houghton saw that she was trembling with nervous excitement.

"Oh, mamma, I am so glad that you have come!"

"What does all this mean, Margie?" Mrs. Houghton asked in a low tone, inclining her head toward the figures seated about the table.

She had been so anxious, her suspense had been so intolerable, that she had neither eyes nor ears for any save her daughter when she entered.

At her question, however, Margaret turned and made a little gesture toward a figure standing by a window, while a glad smile illumined her features.

"Louis!" whispered her mother, a look almost of awe settling over her face, while her heart leaped into her throat, as she realized that he was alive and there in her presence.

His eyes were upon them, and he nodded and smiled at her; he could not come to them at that moment, as some one claimed his attention just then.

Mr. Houghton and Mr. Forest had seen him the moment the door was opened, and they had stopped upon the threshold, struck motionless with astonishment; they could scarcely credit the evidence of their own senses.

Mr. Forest was the first to recover himself, and rushed forward, his benevolent face all aglow, and seized the young man's hand in an almost vise-like grip.

"I had just heard such dreadful news about you," he said, in a glad, yet trembling, voice, "and I can hardly believe, even now, that it is you whom I behold."

"It is I, nevertheless," Louis answered, returning his grip, "and I am very glad to see you, Mr. Forest, even though I am not in very good trim to meet any one," with a rueful glance at his disordered attire.

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Mr. Houghton now joined them.

"Where have you been all these weeks, Dunbar?—what does it all mean?—I am completely dazed," he said, mechanically returning Louis' hand-shake.

"It is a long story, and I have no time to tell it now; I have, however, been rather badly used, and in a very critical situation; I should not be here, even now but for the courage and energy of your own daughter," Louis responded, bending a fond, grateful look upon Margaret, who was approaching with her mother.

Louis grasped the trembling hand which Mrs. Houghton held out to him.

"It is not my ghost," he said, lightly, and smiling, "this is a good strong hand, even yet, dear Mrs. Houghton," and, indeed he convinced her of the truth of his assertion by a vigorous clasp.

"What in the world has Margie had to do with your disappearance?" ejaculated Mr. Houghton, astonished at what he had said, regarding his daughter.

"Nothing with my disappearance, but everything for my reappearance," he answered.

"Tell us about it, young man—tell us about it; I am very impatient to hear about this extraordinary adventure," said Mr. Forest, abruptly, and with a nervousness of manner that they all noticed.

Louis turned crimson.

He had always greatly admired Mr. Forest, but he had been much disturbed upon seeing him enter the room.

He felt extremely awkward now; it would be very hard to tell him that it was through the villainy of his own nephew that all this trouble had been brought about.

"Well, perhaps I may tell you something of it," he said, after a moment of thought, and drawing them a little aside, and arranging seats for them, he gave them a brief outline of what had transpired during the weeks he had been missing.

He avoided, however, mentioning the name of the man that so wronged him—he could not bear to do that with Mr. Forest sitting there and regarding him so earnestly. He believed that he was fondly attached to his nephew, that he intended making him his heir, and, even though he knew that he must soon learn all the bitter truth, he

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shrank from being the first to bring this heavy sorrow upon him.

The man's eyes never left his face during his story—he appeared to be completely absorbed in it—scarcely breathing as he listened.

When he came to Margaret's agency in his release, her father and mother were astonished beyond measure.

"Margie, how did you happen to discover anything about this strange affair? I cannot comprehend! I——" began Mr. Houghton, aghast.

"It is a long story, papa," she interrupted, adding, with evident embarrassment, as she glanced toward Mr. Forest: "And I am afraid it will not be altogether a pleasant one for you to hear, either."

"Who was this man who assaulted you and stole the money? did you know him?" demanded Mr. Forest, turning suddenly to Louis.

"Yes, sir, well," he answered, gravely, "and as I have already told you he was forced at the muzzle of the revolver that Miss Houghton brought me, to exchange places with me; they have gone after him, he will be here presently to answer for himself."

"What is his name, Louis? do not keep us in suspense," said Mr. Houghton, while a vague suspicion of the truth began to creep into his mind.

"You will know very soon," Louis replied, evasively; then added, in a lower tone: "But, believe me, I bear the man no malice; he is young——"

"Young? It is not your father, then?" cried Mrs. Houghton, eagerly.

She had been expecting every moment that he would mention him as the author of all his trouble.

"No," he returned, sadly; "he is, as I said, a young man; it might have been his first offense of this kind; and if there is any way by which we can hush up the matter and save his name from public shame, I shall do my utmost to accomplish it, and I entreat your co-operation, also."

"He should be made to suffer to the full extent of the law, whoever he is," Mr. Forest cried, indignantly.

There came the sound of footsteps at this moment in the outer room.

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Margaret started, growing pale, while she glanced nervously at Mr. Forest.

Louis colored painfully, and looked greatly disturbed, while every one else looked expectant.

"They are bringing him. I—Mr. Forest, I wish you might have been spared this," Louis stammered, laying his hand with a touch of sympathy upon that gentleman's shoulder.

Before he could respond, or, indeed, comprehend the meaning of the kindly words, the door was thrown open, and Arthur Aspinwall was led into the room between two men.

One rapid glance about the apartment revealed every face in it to the wretched young man, while, as he met his uncle's stern, fixed gaze, he staggered as if from a blow, and in a low tone, muttered something to himself.

They placed a chair for him, and he sank into it, dropping his head upon his breast.

Mr. Forest sprang to his feet, hesitated an instant, and then sat down again, his face now as pale as his nephew's.

Then there followed a lengthy examination of his case, and a discussion upon all its points.

The directors insisted upon beginning all over again; there seemed even yet a dim suspicion in the minds of some that Louis might in some way have been in league with Arthur.

Louis began the story, relating all that had occurred up to the time of Margaret's appearance in his place of confinement.

She was then requested to relate minutely her proceedings, which she did, in a clear, straightforward manner.

When she had concluded, she drew her purse from her pocket and took from it something wrapped in tissue paper.

Rising, she walked, with grace and dignity, to the cashier's desk, and laid it down before one of the directors.

"This," she said, "is the diamond which I found among the folds of the draperies in our parlor, behind the *tête-à-tête* I have mentioned, and where I believed Mr. Aspinwall was concealed during the interview that I had with

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Mr. Dunbar on the evening of his disappearance and of the robbery."

The gentleman unrolled the paper, and there rolled out into his hand a pure white stone, like a great drop of dew.

"This is all that I have to tell," Margaret went on, as she resumed her seat, "unless I bear testimony to the fact of Mr. Dunbar's discovery of the gold, which was concealed in a secret closet—which any one may see—behind a panel of the wainscoting in the room adjoining the one in which he was confined."

Arthur was then asked if he had anything to say in his own defense.

"Nothing," he replied, in a hollow tone, but without lifting his bowed head.

"Is the story to which we have just been listening a true one?"

"Yes."

This avowal caused considerable excitement for a moment. Louis was exonerated at last—no taint would henceforth rest upon his character.

But after the first sigh of relief, he sprang again to his feet, an anxious look upon his fine face.

"My friends," he began, "the acknowledgment just made by Mr. Aspinwall, of course, removes all doubt from your minds, and you look upon me as an honest man again. But while I desire to have my good name vindicated and to stand clear in the eyes of the world, I wish to plead for your indulgence toward Mr. Aspinwall. I have told you before that he has been laboring under peculiar difficulties, and that the temptation was also a peculiar one. Think of him, if you please, as being suddenly hurled from affluence to almost a state of beggary; it would have been such but for the timely appearance and kindness of a friend. I have known him all my life; he is one of my own countrymen, and as such I do not wish him disgraced. I knew his mother, a lovely, Christian woman, who spent the best of her life in trying to make her boy a true and noble man; for her sake, I plead for him. For my own sake, also, I plead for him; I have been the greatest sufferer in this affair, and yet I do not wish to appear against him in public. I can-

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not bear the thought that my evidence would convict him of a great crime and doom him to an ignominous punishment, and I ask, as a personal favor, that you will suspend all proceedings against him; requiring, of course, some pledge from him as to his future life."

"It is impossible! it is impossible!" cried the directors, looking indignant and excited over such an astounding, almost absurd, request; while Arthur himself seemed to have forgotten for the moment, his own situation, and then regarded him with amazement.

"Listen, please," Louis pursued, earnestly, "your money has all been restored to you, excepting perhaps eight hundred or a thousand francs, and that, with the interest on the whole, I have promised, shall be replaced; you have therefore nothing to gain or lose by prosecuting the case further. Besides this you will entail upon me and my friends very unpleasant results by so doing. If the matter goes into court, it will place Miss Houghton, who, I may as well inform you, is my promised wife, in an extremely disagreeable position; she shrinks from becoming so conspicuous—from having her name emblazoned upon bulletin boards, and sown broadcast over the land in the newspapers; and if I can consent to overlook the wrong done to myself—the danger, suffering and unjust suspicions—cannot you concede this much to me?"

"But he is a criminal. Who knows what he will do next, if he is let loose? he should be confined—should be put where he can do no further harm to any one," was the unfavorable response.

"You can require him to leave your country, pledging himself never to return under penalty of arrest," urged Louis.

"Mons. Dunbar does not think of himself at all. How can he stand clear, how can all suspicion be removed from him unless the facts of the affair are made public?" gravely asked one gentleman.

"That can be arranged, we will arrange it somehow; only I beg you grant me this one request. I wish no reward, you have offered a large sum; but I will relinquish all claim to it if you will gratify me in this."

Louis pleaded so earnestly and heartily that the stern faces around him began to relent.

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"What is he to you?" some one asked, suddenly, and regarding him curiously.

"My countryman, and the comrade of by boyhood," the young man answered, gravely.

Arthur cringed beneath the words as if some one had struck him with a lash.

The comrade of his boyhood!

It was a coal of fire that would eat and burn into his soul as long as he lived.

"That is all? you have no motive save that of friendliness and the desire to do a kind act?" questioned the same gentleman.

"That is all," Louis returned, earnestly, "unless it is the hope that this experience may prove the turning point in his life, and he may be led to strive for the honorable manhood that was the hope and prayer of his mother."

He glanced involuntarily toward Arthur, as he concluded, and he was sure that he saw a tear roll down his haggard cheek.

Mr. Forest now rose and advanced toward the directors.

"Gentlemen," he said, in a husky, unsteady voice, "I am the friend of whom Mr. Dunbar has spoken to you. I am obliged to confess that yonder unfortunate offender is my own nephew; his mother was my sister; consequently I have a deep personal interest in him. Can I confer with you in private for a little while?"

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## CHAPTER XLIV.

### MR. FOREST'S STORY.

Mr. Forest's statement was received with some surprise, but his request for a private interview was granted, and he withdrew with the directors to another room, where he was closeted with them for a long while.

When he returned his face was white and agitated, and there were traces of tears upon his cheeks, while his companions appeared to be moved and softened also.

Whatever arguments he had used in Arthur's behalf, it was plainly to be seen that they had been effectual, and

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that the gentlemen had consented to drop everything just where it was.

"Arthur," Mr. Forest said, addressing his nephew, "these gentlemen whom you have so wronged, have at last consented to stay their proceedings, and allow you to go free."

He was interrupted by a groan, while Arthur sank back in his chair, overcome by the reaction.

"But upon one condition," his uncle continued, "that you leave the country never to return. I have given bonds and a pledge that you shall leave within three days. If you do not I forfeit a large amount and you will be liable to arrest. But that will give you ample time to settle everything, and now we will return to our lodgings, where I shall have something further of importance to say to you."

"Is this true?" Arthur Aspinwall asked, in a hollow voice, lifting his haggard face, and glancing incredulously about him.

Every eye he met was full of pity; not one in the room appeared to regard him with anything of malice or vindictiveness.

"Yes, it is true," replied his uncle.

The young man struggled to his feet.

For one moment he stood irresolute, then he said, hoarsely:

"I confess I did not expect this—I know I do not deserve it; while as for you," turning his blood-shot eyes upon Louis, "you have taken the most effectual revenge you could have conceived. I did not believe you when you told me that you would use your influence for me. I suppose what you have done would be called 'coals of fire.' They are such to me, and they will burn as long as I live. I thank you, gentlemen," he added, turning to the directors, "for your clemency. I wish I might in some way show my appreciation of this unmerited favor. Uncle Albert, I am ready now."

Mr. Forest spoke a few words in a low tone to Mr. Houghton, then, taking his nephew by the arm, he led him from the room, for he was groping his way as if he had been suddenly stricken with blindness.

Outside the building they found waiting the carriage

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that had brought Arthur there. Entering this, they were driven rapidly back to Mr. Forest's lodgings.

Louis and his friends remained at the office some little while longer, during which it was arranged that a notice should appear in the Paris papers as soon as Arthur should have left the city, stating some of the particulars of the robbery and Louis' imprisonment, and that the real rogue, finding himself upon the verge of arrest, had made a confession, restored the missing money, and then left for parts unknown. Thus Louis' innocence would be established, he would be restored to his former position of honor and trust, and the affair, after the usual nine days of wonder, would gradually be forgotten.

This matter being settled, Louis arranged for the release of his father; then, thanking the directors for their kindness, he and his friends withdrew.

When they were seated in the carriage, Mr. Houghton informed them that Mr. Forest had requested them to drive directly to his rooms as soon as they were at liberty, as he had something of vital importance upon which he wished to confer with them.

Arriving at his lodgings, Mr. Forest himself met them at the door and conducted them at once to his rooms.

Arthur was nowhere visible, but they could hear him moving about in his own chamber, preparing, no doubt, for his departure.

Mr. Forest invited his guests to be seated, saying that he had an important revelation which he wished to make before his nephew left, and he had decided to go immediately, leaving him to settle his bills and some other little business.

He then stepped to the door and called Arthur. He came in, looking pale and dejected and sank into the nearest seat.

Mr. Forest then went to a traveling bag that stood upon the table, and taking something from it, walked directly to Louis.

He was very much agitated; his hands shook, his lips twitched, and every one regarded him with astonishment.

Then came the startling question:

"My son, can you ever be persuaded to give to me the name of 'father?'"

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His voice shook like a very old man's as he put the query.

"Mr. Forest! Son! I do not understand you!" Louis cried, starting to his feet, and staring at the man as if he thought him insane.

He smiled sadly, and rubbed his forehead with his hand.

"I do not wonder," he returned, apologetically. "I am a sorry blunderer; I did not mean to blurt it out in any such way; but you are my son, nevertheless."

"How can that be?" Louis asked, very pale, and trembling visibly. "My father, Louis Murray, is at this moment lying a prisoner here in the city."

"Louis Murray is not your father," asserted Mr. Forest, a ring of impatience in his voice.

"But he proved it—he produced a certificate of marriage with my mother; everything he said went to show that he was my father," Louis objected, but growing more and more excited.

"That was all a deception, my boy, a plot, evidently, to further purposes of his own. In the first place, the man's name is not Murray at all; he only took that name because a Louis Murray and an Annie Burgess had been married on the date corresponding with that engraving upon your mother's wedding-ring. His real name is John Hicks."

Louis looked bewildered.

"Sit down," continued Mr. Forest, "and let me tell you all about it. I have done a good deal of traveling and hard work during the last few weeks. I have been to America——"

"To America!" exclaimed the Houghtons, astonished.

"Yes. I was almost convinced before I left that Louis was my son. I had seen the ring he wears, and—there were other proofs of which I will speak later. As I said, I went to America. I found Mr. Allen, your lawyer friend, and learned your whole story, and after telling him mine and my suspicion, he bent all his energies to aid me in finding the proofs I desired. I found Mary Jones, too, and felt more than ever convinced, after talking with her, that the delicate woman who died in her house was my wife.

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"But all doubts regarding your connection with the man Murray were removed when we found his accomplice, Black, and he betrayed the whole plot to us. Murray, or Hicks, had played him false, getting possession of a sum of money belonging to them both, and disappearing very mysteriously—that was probably when he came here to Paris.

"Black was so sore over it that he was willing to tell us everything. He said that there was a gang of them leagued together in the gambling business; they had spotted you—thought you an unusually smart and promising fellow, and laid the plot to get you into their power and make you useful in their business. Hicks had found out some things regarding your history, worming a good deal out of Mary Jones, and overheard a conversation between you and Farmer Brown in Mr. Allen's office one day, and then hunted the city register over for some one named Annie, who had been married the same date as your mother. The rest was easy enough—to forge a certificate, and, with the facts they had gathered, together with what they invented, claim you as Murray's son."

"Well," Louis observed, with a deep sigh, as if a heavy load had suddenly removed from his heart, "I can now account for the feeling of aversion that I always entertained for that man, and which I always blamed myself for as being so unnatural."

"And now have you been impressed by me?" Mr. Forest asked, turning toward him with a wistful look.

"I have been drawn toward you from the first, sir; but I cannot realize that it is my good fortune to really belong to you." Louis answered with emotion, as he stretched out his hand to him.

The man grasped it warmly, and for a moment could not speak.

"Do you remember the evening you showed me the ring you wear?" he asked at length.

"Perfectly; and I recall now something strange in your manner upon reading the date upon the inside."

"You also told me something about a volume of Tennyson's poems, and a verse written upon the fly-leaf and signed 'A,'" pursued Mr. Forest.

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"Yes, sir."

"Can you repeat these lines?"

Louis immediately recited those simple words, and was surprised to see the tears start into the eyes of his companion.

"I gave that little book of poems to your mother; I wrote those lines on the blank leaf," he said. "Your mother's name was Annie Louise Dunbar; she was my idolized wife, and we had agreed that if we ever should be so fortunate as to have a son we could call him Louis Dunbar Forest."

"Can it be possible!" exclaimed Mr. Houghton. "What a history you have, Louis!"

Arthur Aspinwall turned toward the group, and looking helplessly into Louis' face, said:

"I have known it for a long time."

"You!" cried his uncle, sharply; "how did you know it?"

"It is no matter how; but I did," he replied, dropping his head upon his breast again.

"There is only one way in which you could have found it out," retorted Mr. Forest; "and if you resorted to such means to gain your knowledge, you are more of a knave and burglar than I had believed you. Confess, now—you have been overhauling my chest; you found my wife's picture, you recognized Louis' resemblance to it, and you have seen our marriage certificate."

"I have seen them—yes."

"Humph! that, perhaps, was another reason why you wanted to get this young man out of your path; you knew if I discovered his relationship to me your chances for becoming my heir were extremely small. You have played your cards pretty well, Arthur; but it was all in a wrong cause. If you had been honest and manly, and lent us your aid, you might, even now, have shared with Louis."

"Let me tell my story," Mr. Forest resumed, leaning back in his chair beside Louis, and laying his hand fondly upon his shoulder. "When I was a young man about your age I was returning upon a certain occasion from New York to Boston with my mother. We went by boat, for she could not endure the fatigue of traveling by rail,

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and we were just about to land when I met with an adventure; the tickets were being collected; I had just given up mine and was passing down stairs after my mother, when my attention was attracted by some little excitement behind me. The officer collecting the tickets was talking in a loud, irritated voice to some one, and a crowd was rapidly gathering about him. I went back a step or two, my curiosity aroused, and I heard a timid voice declare:

"'Indeed, sir, I purchased a ticket, and put it safely into my pocket-book, but that and all my money have been stolen.'

"'That is an old and worn-out story, miss; it has been tried altogether too often, and it won't go down with me,' retorted the man, sarcastically.

"'But it is true, sir, in this case,' persisted the other voice, with a sort of calm dignity that impressed me. 'I put my purse under my pillow, and when I awoke this morning it was gone.'

"'Have you any baggage?' demanded the officer, in a hard tone.

"'Nothing but this, and a very small trunk containing what little clothing I have,' and she held up a small hand satchel, and upon opening it, as he requested her to do, I saw it contained only a few articles of toilet, some handkerchiefs, etc.

"I had managed to get nearer by this time, and I saw a young girl of perhaps seventeen. She was the loveliest creature I had ever seen. Her face was a perfect oval; her complexion a delicate pink and white. She had dark-brown hair which fell over her shapely forehead in bewitching waves, and she had large, liquid eyes, the expression of which might have softened a heart of stone. Her mouth was small, her lips intensely red, though now they were trembling with anxiety and nervousness.

"'Have you any friends with you?' the man asked her.

"'No, sir; I am traveling alone,' she returned, dropping her lovely eyes, and coloring slightly.

"'Humph!' was the response to this, but the man's eyes were fastened upon her with a look that made me long to strike him to the floor, while he seemed to be considering some question.

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"Suddenly his manner changed.

" 'Well, well,' he said, insinuatingly. 'I guess we can manage it for you; go over yonder, and sit down until I get through here, then I will attend to your case.'

"I advanced boldly to her side, as he said this, and remarked, abruptly:

" 'The lady need not be detained or troubled further about the loss; it is a very easy matter to pay the fare over again.'

"I turned to her, handing her my card, and asked:

" 'Will you allow me to do this for you? Then my mother, who is traveling with me will be glad to lend you her protection and any other aid that you may need during the remainder of your journey, that is if you are going to Boston.

"She glanced from the card into my face, with such a grateful, relieved look out of her magnificent eyes, that I lost my heart to her on the spot.

" 'You are very kind, Mr. Forest,' she said, with graceful dignity, 'and I accept with thanks, your timely offer.'

"The officer gave me an ugly look as I took out my purse and paid her fare; but of course he could not do otherwise than take it; and then I walked away with the beautiful girl on my arm, feeling as if I had rescued her from the jaws of a wolf. I led her directly to my mother, to whom I introduced her, she having told me her name was Miss Dunbar, and explained to her the circumstances of our meeting. She gladly befriended her, and was soon deeply interested in her, while the girl, giving her confidence at once, told her something of her history. Her mother, she said, had died when she was very young —so young that she scarcely remembered her. Her father was a Scotchman, a man of literary tastes and habits, and having applied himself too closely to his studies, impaired his health, and died only two years previous. She had no relatives to care for her, so she cast her lot with some good people, who were coming to our country, believing that America was a land of good and plenty, and they would soon make an independent fortune there. Of course they were bitterly disappointed, and after a year of weary toil, during which they had not ceased to bewail having ever left 'Bonnie Scotland,' they

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returned to their old home, promising themselves never to wander again.

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## CHAPTER XLV.

### ANNIE DISAPPEARS.

"But Miss Dunbar had no means; it had taken her little all to pay her expenses to America, consequently she could not return to Scotland with her friends if she had so desired. She did not care to do so, however, although she felt very lonely to be left behind in a strange country.

"Yet she liked the American people. She had found a situation as governess in a family where she was kindly treated, and where she remained for two years. At the end of that time they also went abroad for a season of travel, and she came to Boston upon the recommendations of her former patrons, to occupy a similar position in a wealthy family in that city.

"This was the account she gave of herself to my mother at the time of which I have spoken, and she became deeply interested in the young girl, and upon our arrival accompanied her to her destination and introduced her to her employers, who happened to be acquaintances of ours.

"But I had lost my heart entirely to the beautiful girl. I felt, from the hour of our meeting, that she, and no other would satisfy the cravings of my heart, and she appeared, though in a timid way, to respond to my sentiment.

"I visited her in her new home. I arranged to meet her upon every possible occasion, and it was not long before I declared my affection, and found that it was reciprocated.

"Some little time before this I had decided to leave college and not complete my course. I was ambitious to make money, and I secured an engagement with a large shipping house in the city, determined to devote my energies to amassing a fortune. This bitterly displeased my father, who was a stern, proud man, and thought more of learning and a position in literary circles than

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of anything else in the world, while, being wealthy himself, he thought it beneath any of his children to engage in trade for the sake of simply making money.

"When, a little later, I informed him of my engagement to the pretty stranger whom my mother and I had met on board the boat from New York to Boston, he was enraged beyond measure.

"He said he thought it was disgraceful enough for a son of his to want to grow up an ignoramus, without letting himself down still lower by marrying a Scotch immigrant, of whom nobody knew anything. He positively forbade my entertaining any such thought, and commanded me to break my engagement at once, or leave my home forever.

"But I inherited something of his high spirit and indomitable will, and I had no notion of obeying him. I loved my beautiful betrothed with all my heart; she was as lovely in mind as in person, and as well fitted to occupy a high position in social life as my own mother, of whom we were all exceedingly proud. But it was in vain that I pleaded this, while even my mother tried to exert her influence in my favor; my father would not listen to one word of it. Then I became angry and disrespectful, and finally left the house in a rage.

"Not a word of this, however, did I break to my promised wife at that time; but there came a time at length when I was obliged to tell her.

"My employers told me one day that they wished to send some one to the far East upon an important commission, and made me a handsome offer if I would consent to undertake it. The inducement was strong, while I thought I saw a prospect of doing something upon my own account also, and I accepted their proposition at once.

"Then I went to Annie and told her what I had done. I urged her to marry me immediately, so that I could leave her with the feeling that I had the right to care for her and she need not toil for her own living; then, when the right oportunity should offer I could send for her to come to me, and there would be nothing to hinder her from doing so; besides, it galled me to go away and leave her filling the position of a servant to others.

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"Then she asked me about my own family—none of them had called upon her or recognized her in any way, and she could not fail to feel it—and she wanted to know how they would be pleased with our marriage—would they receive her cordially as a daughter and sister?

"I was, of course, obliged to answer 'no,' that my father would not be pleased with anything that I might do, for I had offended him deeply by leaving college before my course was completed; and even more, by engaging in a business of which he disapproved, and I had no reason to hope that he would regard with favor any one whom I might wish to marry.

"At first she demurred—she could not connect herself with any family who would regard her with disfavor; but I argued so fondly and earnestly that she at last consented, and we were married in a very quiet way one spring morning, and went straight to the pretty rooms which I had engaged for her, with board, while I should be away.

"We had six weeks to spend together before I should have to sail, and I can say they were the happiest of my life," Mr. Forest said, brokenly, as he came to this portion of his story.

"My beautiful wife grew more and more charming with every day, and as the time of my departure drew near I bitterly deplored the stern fate that would not permit me to take her with me.

"Our parting was the severest trial of my life, and could I have looked forward to the future, I could not have submitted to it at all. I shall never forget the look that was on her lovely, tear-stained face, as it lay for the last time upon my breast and I held her in that final embrace.

" 'I feel almost as if I were losing you forever,' she said, in a trembling tone; 'but—oh, Albert, whatever happens you will always remember how well I loved you. If I cannot come to you before your three years are out, I shall welcome you back as a fond and faithful wife; if I die——"

" 'Hush, my darling!' I cried, with a sudden sinking at my heart. 'You must not talk like this—you will unnerve me.'

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"'I hope God will spare us to each other,' she said, softly. 'But you will never forget how well I loved you?'

"'I will not forget,' I answered, and almost feeling as if I never should see her again.

"I cannot linger over that painful scene," Mr. Forest said, tremulously. "I sailed that day, and I never heard one word from my wife. I have never seen her from that day to this, nor had any tidings of her beyond six months after my departure.

"I had deposited in one of the banks for her use a sum of money, which I thought would be sufficient for all her needs until I could reach my destination and turn myself about a little. I had not very much ahead, having been only a little more than a year in business; but I knew my income would be ample for our support. I do not know where the difficulty lay, but I sent her money regularly every three months, but it could never have reached her, as I learned afterward of her poverty and destitution.

"My anxiety was intense when month after month went by and I received no letters from her, but I kept hoping that every mail—which in those days was not as frequent as now—would bring me some tidings of my dear one.

"My business prospered both for my employers and for myself, and when my three years expired I returned with all possible speed to seek my wife, but with a sense of foreboding and misery at my heart that was but a tithe of what was to follow.

"Arriving in Boston, I went directly to the place where I had left her. She was not there. The family who had formerly resided there, and with whom she had boarded, had also moved away, and no one could tell me whither they had gone.

"I sought the city through and through. In anguish and wretchedness I traversed street after street, inquiring in every place where I thought I should be likely to obtain tidings of her; but not one word could I learn regarding her.

"My father had died during my absence, cutting me off with a single dollar. My mother had become a helpless paralytic, my brothers and sisters were scattered, and

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with my other deep trouble, I felt like an alien and a stranger in my own country.

"I spent six long weary months looking for my wife. I advertised in all the papers, but to no purpose; I never obtained the slightest clew to her fate, and then returned to my foreign business, believing that my Annie was dead.

"Ten years later I returned again. Then I met, by accident, the woman with whom I had left my wife. She told me that she had remained with her for six or eight months after my departure, and had been ill most of that time. Then her means gave out—she had received nothing from me, and with doctors' bills, medicines, and other bills, she had used up all that I had deposited for her. She then began to take in work to do, and tried to support herself, but could not earn enough to do that, as she was living, and she accordingly moved into an humbler locality.

"Her former landlady went there to see her occasionally, for she felt deep sympathy for and interest in her, particularly, as she told me, on account of her delicate condition—since she expected soon to become a mother.

"But every time she saw her she seemed to have grown sadder and thiner, and soon after, being obliged to move from the city, she lost track of her altogether. This intelligence revived my hopes somewhat, and I devoted some time to further inquiries; but it availed nothing, and I again returned to my foreign home a sad and heartbroken man, believing that my wife and child—if indeed one had ever been born to me—were dead. I devoted myself to business, and I prospered; money seemed to flow in upon me almost spontaneously, and I was rapidly amassing the fortune that I had craved as a young man. But I cared little for it—my life was ruined, for I had no one with whom to share my prosperity—no one to love or care for me.

"Still there was no peace for me except in hard and absorbing work, and so I kept on and on.

"Wearied at last with the monotony of my existence, I resolved to travel. I settled my affairs in the East—having no desire to return there—and then began my wanderings. I have been almost everywhere in Europe,

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and have spent a good deal of time in France. I had come to Paris for the second time only a few weeks previous to my acquaintance with you. You all know how I encountered my nephew.

"He was my favorite sister's son, and I felt well pleased to meet him. I was prepossessed with him at first, although I could not approve of the useless kind of life he was leading; for a young man at twenty-five should have his mind settled upon his future career. However, I thought he might not be wholly to blame regarding that, and I resolved to study him thoroughly, and if he proved worthy, eventually make him my heir.

"When I met you," Mr. Forest continued, turning proudly to Louis, "there was something about you that attracted me strangely. Your eyes particularly haunted me, then your name was painfully familiar, although I thought that perhaps it was merely a coincidence. But the day that we all went to Versailles, I received a shock from which I did not recover, and which aroused a wild hope in me that you might be the child of my lost wife, and my son.

"You all remember that picture, and Louis' singular resemblance to it. Well, that painting was almost the exact counterpart of the woman I had loved and lost. Then, when we read the account of Louise de Brienze—how she escaped to Scotland during the reign of terror, and there married a man by the name of Dunbar—it struck me that she might have been an ancestor of Annie, who was a man of Scotch descent, and whose father had been a man of literary tastes and great learning, like the husband of M'lle de Brienze. I resolved at once to sift the matter to the bottom.

"After learning all that I could regarding Louis in America, I went to Scotland, where I have been searching and studying the genealogy of the Dunbar family for several weeks.

"I have proved that my suspicions were correct, and that my Annie was the granddaughter of Mlle. Louise de Brienze, whose wonderful beauty descended to her—my wife.

"As you know, Mlle. de Brienze fled to Scotland, where

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she married Wallace Dunbar, the great grandson of the poet, William Dunbar. She had several children, but none lived beyond the age of five years, excepting a son, born in 1809, whom they named Louis. He grew to manhood, and was finely educated, but his family becoming impoverished, they retired to a small estate in the south of Scotland, where the young man married a young Scotch lady in 1823.

"They had one child only, Annie Louise—my Annie—who was born in 1830. Her mother died when she was but two years of age. Her father lived until she was sixteen, but though they were always in reduced circumstances, he bestowed great care upon her education, and she was possessed of a rarely cultivated mind.

"All this I have learned since leaving Paris, and you can imagine that I have been a very busy individual. I was almost sure that Louis was my son before I left, but I would not say so until I proved it beyond a doubt.

"The ring he wears is, I am positive, the one that I placed upon his mother's hand the day I married her. The book he describes I am confident I gave her. Mary Jones says she had a beautiful pearl ring which she was obliged to dispose of in order to defray the expenses attendant upon her death. I had given her an expensive pearl of an engagement-ring; and finally, Louis bears the very name we had planned to give our first son, should we have one."

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## CHAPTER XLVI.

### GENEROSITY TO THE ERRING.

"But my surname should be Forest, if I am your son, and my mother always gave her name as 'Mrs. Dunbar,'" Louis said, as Mr. Forest paused in his story.

"True; but there was a reason for that," replied Mr. Forest, with a grave face. "When I was in America, I spent a day or two with my youngest sister; she had the care of my mother during her last illness, and the furniture belonging to her had been given to Augusta.

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Among other things there was a desk that belonged to my father. His papers had remained untouched in it ever since his death, but after my mother died my sister thought it foolish to keep them longer, and after looking them thoroughly over she destroyed most of them. But among them she came across a scrap which she thought might throw some light on the fate of my wife, and so she saved it in case I should ever return. Here it is."

He took a folded paper from his pocket-book and handed it to Louis.

On one side there was some writing in a lady's delicate hand; on the other a few lines dashed off in a bold, running style.

The first proved to be a note from Annie Forest to her husband's father, and written a number of months after her husband's departure for the East. It stated that she had heard nothing from him—that the money he had left her had all given out; her health was very delicate, and she appealed to him for assistance until she could receive news and a remittance from his son.

It was a touching appeal, delicately worded and very carefully written; but it had not availed to move the hard heart of the stern, unrelenting man, whose authority had been defied, and he had evidently turned the letter over and dashed off an angry and unfeeling reply, probably intending to send it back to her in that way. He must, however, have thought best not to insult her to that extent, and probably copied his reply upon another sheet.

"Madam," it ran, "my son has defied me—has disgraced himself and his family, and I have forbidden him ever to return to us; therefore it is not likely that I can have much respect or sympathy for the woman who would consent to marry him in the face of his father's express command to the contrary. If you are 'Mrs. Annie Forest,' please never flaunt it in my face again; but if your 'husband'—so-called—has played you false, my advice would be to hide yourself and your shame under some other name, and not still further disgrace his relatives by claiming a tie, the existence of which, perhaps, you have no means to prove.

"SAMUEL FOREST."

"What a cruel letter!" Louis cried, indignantly, while his face flushed a hot, angry crimson.

"It was a heartless reply to a sensitive girl like her,

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and it must have been the last blow to crush her heart," returned Mr. Forest, bitterly. "She had, indeed," he went on, "no means of proving her marriage, for I had the certificate in my own possession, never dreaming that any one would doubt the fact of her being my wife; while, perhaps, after all, in her loneliness and poverty, she may have grown gradually to fear that I regretted the hasty steps, and 'played her false,' as my father hinted, and acting upon the suggestion in his letter, she must have taken her maiden name, and hidden herself in some obscure locality, and lived out her sad life in silent suffering. No one can ever know the pain this has caused me; I was nearly wild at first over it. My father is dead, and I would not traduce him, but if he was living I should demand a serious reckoning."

"This writing is like my mother's—it is like that which I have in the little book of which I spoke," Louis said, turning to the first half of the sheet, while his lips trembled with emotion.

"Another proof, my boy," responded Mr. Forest, adding, "And I have here in my hand the proof of my marriage with Annie Dunbar."

He passed a small case to Louis as he spoke.

It was that mother-of-pearl case which we have already seen in Arthur Aspinwall's hands.

Louis opened it, and found himself gazing down into the face of that exquisitely beautiful woman, whom Arthur had at once recognized as belonging in some way to him, from the strong resemblance between them.

It was indeed very much like the portrait he had seen at Versailles in *La Petite Trianon*, and he could not doubt that she was a descendant of the lovely and noted Mlle. Louise de Brienze.

Those large, liquid eyes, that white, shapely forehead, those sweet, sensitive lips seemed very familiar to Louis as he looked, and he knew that it was because his own fine face reflected something of this fair loveliness.

Mr. Forest reached forward, and removed the velvet pad from the other side of the case.

There was a folded paper underneath.

"Take it out and read it," he said.

Louis obeyed, and found it was the certificate of mar-

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iage before referred to, and that the date corresponded with that upon the ring which he wore.

"Yes, it must be true," he murmured, looking up and meeting the gaze of the noble man beside him. "I believe that I am your son."

A thrill of pride and affection shot through Louis' heart as their eyes met, and involuntarily he extended his hand.

Mr. Forest grasped it eagerly.

"If there is anything in the wide world that would help to heal the wound that has rankled in my heart for so many years the knowledge that you are my son will do much toward it. Heaven bless you, my boy!"

"What is this?" Louis asked, taking up and unfolding that little paper that contained a curl of silken, nut-brown hair.

"It is a lock that I cut from your mother's hair the evening before I sailed, and her own fingers coiled it and tied it with its knot of blue ribbon for me; that other paper contains a little scrap of the dress that she was married in—they, with the picture, are the most sacred treasures I possess."

Louis handled them tenderly—they were sacred to him also; while he was so grateful for that picture, so glad that he could know just how the young mother, for whom his heart had always yearned, had looked. How lovely she was, and how sad the story of her brief life."

"I wonder, Louis," Mr. Forest said, breaking in upon this sad reverie, "how you have ever attained to such a noble manhood with all the world against you, as I know it was at the outset."

Louis' eyes turned involuntarily toward his betrothed.

"She has had much to do with whatever good there is in me," he said, a fond smile wreathing his lips.

Margaret colored crimson at this tribute.

"Do not let him make you believe any such nonsense," she returned, trying to smile as she wiped the tears from her cheeks. She had been deeply affected by the sorrowful story that Mr. Forest had related.

"You may be sure," she continued, "as I have often told him—that the good was in him, and he had only to cultivate it to make it bear fruit abundantly."

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"I feel assured of that," Mr. Forest answered, earnestly regarding the manly face beside him. "still, I am not unmindful of the good influences that were thrown around him years ago; nor of those, which I am proud to say, will grace his future life. I congratulate you both, my children, and I trust that you will be willing to give me a little corner in your hearts and your home."

Tears sprang into Louis' eyes to hear this man plead so hungrily for the love which had been so long denied him, and his heart went out to him in a glad thrill of love and veneration.

He had admired him from the moment of their meeting, and now that it was proved that they belonged to each other, it seemed almost the proudest, the grandest hour of his life.

Father! His childish lips had never been allowed to give utterance to the word, though his young heart had often rebelled at being so poverty-stricken in all that makes the life of little children happy.

Henceforth it would be a sacred word to him, and almost unconsciously he looked up into his companion's face and spoke it aloud.

The strong man nearly broke down as he heard it, while he reached forth and grasped Louis' hand again almost convulsively.

Mr. Houghton turned to the window to hide his emotion, while Margaret and her mother were forced to use their handkerchiefs anew.

But Mr. Forest soon regained command of himself.

"Time is passing," he said, with a glance at Arthur, "and as he has decided to leave Paris to-night on the midnight express for Havre, he must be on the move. But I feel, Louis, that some acknowledgment is due you in his presence for the noble part you took toward obtaining his release."

Louis flushed, but he answered, quietly:

"I bear him no malice; of course I feel the wrong, but I have no desire to take any revenge for it, and I am greatly relieved that we succeeded in staving proceedings against him. I know that he always disliked me as a boy; why, I cannot conceive; but I supopse his enmity of late has been occasioned by my being the cause of a deep

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disappointment to him," and again his gaze wandered to Margaret.

"Not wholly," Arthur answered, raising his head, and meeting his eye for the first time since entering the room, "though I confess I did deeply hate you for supplanting me in Margie's affections. But I may as well out with the whole. I have always been jealous of you; when I first met you I recognized in you a strong character—I recognized your superiority, and it galled and angered me; that alone is the secret of my early dislike for you. Since coming to Paris I discovered, as my uncle has surmised, that you were his son, and I knew well enough that your mutual admiration would eventually lead you to make the discovery also. In that case, instead of my inheriting his handsome fortune, you, whom I had always hated, would get all his money. I reasoned that if you could only be got out of the way, I might succeed in winning all that I desired," with a glance at Margaret. "I meant to keep you locked up, as I said before, until you should consent to leave the country, and that failing, I should have put you in some private mad-house where you would be safely out of my way forever."

"What a wretch!" murmured Margaret, with white lips.

"You are even worse than I believed," said Mr. Forerst, sternly.

"I make this confession, not because I am reckless or defiant," Arthur pursued, humbly, "but that you may know just where I have stood; it is a part of my punishment. I knew that I have been willful and selfish all my life; if adversity has served to make Louis Dunbar a strong, true man, prosperity and unlimited indulgence have been my ruin. I can see it now when it is too late. I am not, however, ungrateful for what you have done to-day to save me from a felon's doom, although any such expressions might seem forced and hypocritical in connection with the confessions that I have just made; but if I should never see any of you again I would like you to remember that I was not so hardened that I could not be grateful or would not say that I am sorry."

He looked up appealingly to Louis as he said this.

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Louis bowed with a troubled face, then all at once turned his frank gaze upon Arthur.

"I regret the past more than ever now," he said; "since this recent discovery makes us relatives. I wish that we could have been friends; then our future relations might have been so pleasant."

"That sounds very kind," Arthur retorted, bitterly, "but I can hardly believe that the son and heir of the wealthy Albert Forest would be willing to share his good fortune with a penniless relative; surely you and I have exchanged places very strangely."

"You wrong me if you think that I would grudge you any good which my father might choose to bestow upon you," Louis replied, earnestly, "and—and—pardon me," turning with an embarrassed air to his father, "how will he be provided for in the future?"

Arthur started from his chair, muttering something inaudible, and hastily quitted the room.

Mr. Forest thought a moment before replying to Louis' question.

"Before my suspicions regarding you were proved to be correct," he at length said, "I had hoped to induce him, upon returning to America with me, to enter upon some regular business or profession, and if he showed himself worthy, I should undoubtedly have made him my heir upon my death. Of course, all that will be changed now, and to-day, when I discovered the extent of his crimes, I felt that no penalty, however severe, would be too bad for him. But he is the son of Gertrude, my favorite sister. I know he has nothing; that he is deeply in debt here in Paris, and I am afraid he is not likely to do much for himself in the way of earning a living. I cannot bear that he should suffer. What do you advise me to do for him?"

"I do not feel that I am competent to advise," Louis returned more embarrassed than before. "Of course, I know nothing regarding your resources, and it would be very presumptuous in me to tell you what to do."

Mr. Forest smiled.

"You may call me a millionaire; you will not rate me too high then," he said, adding, "now, I will fill Arthur out a check for whatever amount you say."

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"I would rather not, sir," objected Louis, with heightened color.

"My son, all that I have is yours from this time forth," said Mr. Forest, and drawing from his pocket a checkbook upon the Bank of England, together with a stylographic pen, he laid them both in Louis' hands.

"Now what would you do if you were worth that sum and in my place?" he asked. "Write the amount upon one of those slips, and let me see it."

Louis saw that he was in earnest, and could not refuse to comply with his request.

He took the book, wrote something upon one of the checks, and then passed it back to his father, saying:

"That will give him a pretty fair start in life if he is disposed to use it rightly; if not, you certainly need not be troubled with remorse for not having done your duty toward him."

Mr. Forest read the amount—it was for ten thousand dollars—and smiled a pleased assent.

Then tearing the check from the book, he signed it, after which he excused himself, and followed his nephew from the room.

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## CHAPTER XLVII.

### ARTHUR LEAVES PARIS.

"What are your plans, Arthur?" Mr. Forest questioned, as he entered his room and found the young man standing thoughtfully beside his portmanteau, which he had just finished packing.

"I have none beyond getting out of this country as soon as possible," he answered, moodily.

"Do not let your mistake make you reckless, my boy," said Mr. Forest, kindly, "it is never too late to begin to do right while we have life and health."

"Alas! my life has been nothing but a mistake from beginning to end."

"Well, half the battle is fought when we become conscious of our sin—the other half must be fought to conquer it," said his uncle. "I cannot forget," he resumed,

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with some emotion, "that you are my sister's son, and I shall always feel an interest in you. I hope you will try to do well from this time on, but if you get sick or in trouble at any time, I want you to let me know."

"Do you suppose he will countenance your interest in one who has done him nothing but injury?" Arthur curtly asked, with a motion of his head toward the room where Louis was.

"You wrong him, Arthur," Mr. Forest returned, quickly. "He told you himself that he should grudge you nothing that I might chose to do for you. And see—I can prove it. I asked him to name some sum to give you a start with, and he filled out this check for you with his own hands."

Mr. Forest handed it to him as he spoke.

Arthur took it, and stood silently regarding it for a moment. He was very pale, his face was overcast, there was a deep furrow between his brows, and his lips twitched nervously.

"Uncle Albert, I cannot take it," he burst out, at length.

"Why not?"

"It is too much; it burns me like a red-hot coal." and the paper fluttered from his nerveless fingers to the floor.

Mr. Forest's face brightened.

It was an indication of better things, he thought, to have him show his feeling of unworthiness.

He stood in deep thought for a moment.

"How much shall I give you?" he asked.

"Just enough to get me home. I would not ask that if I had dollar of my own; and—and," he stammered, a hot flush mounting his brow, "those debts—I am ashamed of them—the bills are in this drawer."

He pulled out one of the drawers of the little table that Margaret had admired, and revealed a pile of papers within.

"Very well; I will attend to them," his uncle said, quietly. "And now," he added, stooping to pick up the fallen check, "I think it will be best for you to take this; if you like, when you get home, you can start in some business, and this will be a great help to you. You need

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not take it as a gift unless you choose; take it as a loan, and if you are ever able to replace it you can do so."

The young man hesitated a moment; then he took the paper, folded it carefully, and put it in his wallet.

"I will say good-by to you, here, Uncle Albert; I cannot meet them again," with another nod toward the adjoining room. "You have been very good to me," he added, speaking with difficulty, "and though I have acted the part of a knave and a fool, I believe I have come to my senses sufficiently to appreciate your generous conduct."

He held out his hand as he concluded.

It shook like a leaf in the wind, and his lips were set in a white straight line of pain.

Mr. Forest took it and wrung it; it was a most painful parting for him, and he would gladly have kept the young man with him until his own return if he could have done so.

"Good-by, Arthur," he said, sadly; "let me hear from you, my address will be here for the present, and I beg of you let the future, as far as may be, redeem the past."

His nephew made no response, but, turning suddenly, took up his hat and left the room.

A servant soon came for his baggage, and in an hour from that time Arthur Aspinwall had left Paris forever.

Mr. Forest returned to his friends and informed them of the young man's departure.

The whole party were saddened by the event. They had known him ever since boyhood, and could not help feeling deep regret that one who had had so many advantages, and everything to contribute toward a life of usefulness and success, should have misused his opportunities.

"It is very unwise to rear children in luxury and idleness," Mr. Forest remarked; "they should be taught to act and think for themselves, and be made to feel that they have duties and responsibilities in life."

He glanced with an air of pride at Louis as he spoke. It was wonderful, he thought, considering the unfavorable influences by which he had been surrounded during the early years of his life, that he should have developed into the noble, cultivated gentleman that he was.

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Of course the young man's prospects were all changed upon learning his identity.

He was now the heir to a large fortune, and he could return to his own country whenever he wished, and live as he chose.

His father argued this matter with him one day.

"But, father, I can never consent to live in idleness," he objected; "if I knew I should inherit five times as much, I should be restless and unhappy not to have some regular occupation."

"Of course I know that, and I do not ask you to sit down and fold your hands, but at the same time I do not feel like spending my life here with these chattering Frenchmen; I long for my native land and the scenes of my youth; but I cannot be separated from you; now that I have found my son I want to enjoy his society. Indeed, Louis," Mr. Forest concluded, "you once told me that you would not like to make this a permanent home."

"No; I am too thorough an American not to prefer my own country," Louis responded, "but my position here is an excellent one, and I naturally feel a pride in making the most of it."

"True; but it will be a good opening for some other worthy young man, and we will go home and establish some business that will be both agreeable to us and helpful to others. I believe we can do more good there too; we understand the ways of Americans better than those of any other people, and I long to do something for poor boys there who are struggling upward as you struggled. I shall never see a street gamin after this without thinking of your sad childhood. Will you go, Louis?"

"Yes; I believe that duty as well as inclination points that way," Louis thoughtfully replied.

Other influences also combined to draw him homeward.

"Mr. and Mrs. Houghton would shortly return, and they could not endure the thought of being separated from their only child, and of course they seconded Mr. Forest's proposals and arguments most heartily.

Margaret also longed to go home, although she did not say very much about it, and would have remained with him without a murmur; yet she drooped whenever the

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subject was entertained, and her happiness was more to Louis than any other consideration.

So he gave his notice that he would resign his position at the end of the year, and it was arranged that they should all return together.

The time passed very quickly, and one bright morning about a month before the date fixed for the sailing, there was a brilliant wedding in Mr. Houghton's elegant mansion.

For more than two months previous, Worth had been busily engaged upon the trouseau of the lovely bride-elect, and it was whispered in many a boudoir that it was seldom a richer or more complete outfit was sent forth from this noted establishment. The wedding itself was one long to be remembered, and was attended by many of the *élite* of the French capital.

Mr. Houghton gave away the bride, while Mr. Forest and Mrs. Houghton stood beside the handsome couple, each feeling that a new joy was about to be added to their own life in this crowning happiness of their children.

Louis had been strongly urged by his company to stay with them, and was offered as an inducement a large advance upon his previous salary.

"No," he had said, although gratified by this evidence of their appreciation of his services, his duty to his father pointed in another direction, and he could not reconsider his decision.

Among the elegant gifts presented to Mr. and Mrs. Louis Dunbar Forest, there was a service of solid silver lined with gold and accompanying it a letter asking their acceptance of it as a slight testimonial of the company's high esteem for him as a man of honor and integrity, and also of their gratitude for the signal service that he had so recently rendered them.

Count Lorrain, who had so befriended Margaret on the night of her first visit to Louis, had never availed himself of her permission to call upon her.

He had learned, before the week was out, why she had been abroad, unprotected, and in learning that, had realized at once that here was no hope of his ever winning the lovely American for his wife, as he had hoped to do.

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Margaret had wondered why he did not call—she wanted to thank him again for his kindness to her; but she understood it all, when, after sending him cards for her wedding, she received a costly and beautiful tiara of diamonds, accompanied by the following note:

"Will Mlle. Houghton accept an offering from one who cannot trust himself into her presence—from one who has dared to hope he might aspire to be something more than friend? Forgive the presumption. May your life be rich in blessings, and may he who has won you guard and cherish the treasure that is to crown his life. Adieu. PHILLIPE, Count of Lorrain."

Margaret could not help shedding tears over this pathetic little note, and in return she sent the young nobleman a kind reply, thanking him for his gift, which, she told him, she should prize as one of her greatest treasures, as it would always remind her of his nobility and kindness to her when she was in deep trouble.

Another touching incident had occurred only the evening before her marriage.

A young girl called and begged to see her, but was told that Miss Houghton could receive no one that day.

She instantly produced a card, wrote something upon it, and sent it up to Margaret, saying she would wait for a reply.

The card contained less than a dozen words, but they proved effective.

A brilliant flush suffused Margaret's face as she read, "Aimee Perrine beseeches a moment with Mlle. Houghton," and she instantly dispatched Annette to ask the maiden if she would wave ceremony and come to her in her boudior.

She was indeed "beautiful as an angel," as her brother had said. She was very youthful in appearance, and yet there was a certain dignity about her that showed depth of character and high breeding.

She was slight, fair, and delicate, with great dark eyes that thrilled one through and through. There was a flush on her round cheek, while her chest rose and fell with emotion as she approached the young bride-elect.

"Mademoiselle," she said, in low, sweet tones, dropping upon one knee upon the hassock before Margaret,

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while she looked appealingly into her face, "Auguste has told me all—he repents—he has been in despair. Again he sues for mademoiselle's pardon, and begs, as an assurance, her acceptance of a trifle to grace her gift table."

The young girl laid a beautiful mother-of-pearl casket upon Margaret's lap as she spoke, touched the spring, lifted the cover, and revealed a cross of pearls and diamonds fit for a queen.

The setting was of exquisite workmanship; a row of whole pearls nearly as large as peas extending down the center and across the arms, and on each side of these there was a row of diamonds half the size of the pearls, while a curious and beautiful chain was attached to the top.

"Ah, mademoiselle, you will not refuse!" pleaded the lovely stranger. "With his lips pressed to the cross Auguste swore he would never wrong any one again. You have made him a good man—you have saved my brother, mademoiselle. I thank you. I love you, and may your life be full of joy!"

It is impossible to describe the earnestness and grace with which this was uttered, and Margaret's heart instantly went out to the girl in a gush of tenderness.

She leaned forward and impulsively kissed her fair white forehead, saying:

"Mlle. Perrine, how glad I am that you did not go away without seeing me, and how kind of you to come yourself to bring me this beautiful gift! I shall keep it, and I shall prize it more than I can tell you, and I shall always remember you with so much pleasure."

"And Auguste, my brother?" pleaded Aimee, wistfully.

Margaret flushed. She could not recall that night even now without a thrill of horror.

"Present him my thanks for this lovely cross, and say to him that all was forgiven when he gave me his pledge that he would henceforth respect my sex without regard to position. Present my compliments also to the Marquis De Perrine, and say I consider him a fortunate man to possess the love of such a sister," Margaret responded, with a charming smile.

Her lovely visitor seized her hands and kissed them in a transport of gratitude.

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"Thanks, thanks! Mademoiselle is delightful!" she said, in a tremulous tone.

She then arose to go, and Margaret accompanied her to the door, where she kissed her once more—upon the lips this time—and remarked that she hoped they should meet again; and sweet Aimee Perrine went away wondering if all American girls were such angels and as beautiful as Mlle. Houghton.

Two weeks of festivity and excitement followed the wedding of our young friends, during which they were *fêted* in every imaginable manner, and then they departed to spend a fortnight in London before sailing for home.

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## CHAPTER XLVIII.

### A SOUL SAVED.

Back to his native land Mr. Forest had determined to come; and grand old Boston, although greatly changed since he first left it, had much in it still that was familiar and dear to him.

In the newer portion of the city he purchased a fine residence, which he presented to Louis for his future home, and where the young husband and wife made him feel very welcome and happy as a permanent member of their family.

The next work was to establish himself and his son in a business calculated to give employment to a large number of people, many of whom were boys—orphans and sons of widows, who were gathered from the highways and byways—for the purpose of helping them up from their miserable condition, and teaching them how to depend upon themselves in the future, and to lead honorable and useful lives.

Mr. Forest never turned a deaf ear to the tale of sorrow or want; the thought of his own young wife, with her little babe, suffering for the necessaries of life, was ever present with him, and made him anxious to relieve any one who was in trouble.

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Many a widow had cause to bless him, and many a business man, in after life, was heard to confess that to the generosity and kindness of Forest & Son they owed the success they achieved.

Mr. and Mrs. Houghton resided in the city near their children during the winter, while they insisted upon their spending the summer with them at their beautiful home on the Brookline road—a place that would always be dear to Louis, for there he had first seen the lovely child who had exerted such a powerful influence upon his whole life.

Farmer Brown and his good wife were almost as proud of Louis as if he were their own son, and rejoiced most heartily with him over the good fortune that had come to him; while Mr. Forest formed a deep and lasting friendship for the good man who had befriended his son in his youth.

Mr. Allen, too, was sought, and found, and claimed as an old friend. He had married a lovely woman during Louis' absence, and was prospering in his profession; and now being introduced to the circle in which the Houghtons were accustomed to move, he began to be appealed to by a different class of clients, and to rise in proportion to his business.

Mary Jones was now a widow, her husband having died during the winter, but her three boys were all doing well, and gave promise of a far more thrifty manhood than their father had ever known.

Louis purchased an airy, roomy house, shortly after his return, furnished it throughout, and presented it to her, and Mrs. Jones' lodging-house was noted for its comfort and cleanliness, and was patronized accordingly, thus returning a handsome income to its owner.

Louis' would-be father had made his appearance only once after his release from his imprisonment in Paris. He had entered his office one day, when Louis happened to be there for a few moments alone, and demanded money of him in a somewhat overbearing manner. Louis took no notice at first of it; he was considering what was best for him to do. Finally he handed him three hundred dollars.

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The man had been falsely accused and imprisoned, and he felt that some recompense was due him.

But the man looked dissatisfied with the amount.

"Well, what is the matter?" Louis questioned, observing it.

"I should think a man would feel rather mean to send his own father back to America on a paltry three hundred, especially when he is about to pocket a handsome fortune with the girl he marries," returned the man, with a disagreeable but knowing leer.

Louis regarded him a moment in silence, marveling within himself at the different natures there were in the world.

At last he arose, and, looking the man straight in the eye, said quietly:

"John Hicks, you can return to America, or you can go to any other country you choose, but I warn you that it will be wise in you never to show your face to me again. Your history is known to me, and if you ever come to me again demanding anything of me upon that old bogus claim, you will find yourself handed over to the authorities without ceremony."

The man stood staring blankly at Louis for a full minute; then, without a word, he turned away and slunk out of his sight, and Louis never saw him again.

Six months after our friends' return from abroad, Ada Parker came to Margaret one morning, her fair face covered with blushes, and a new tenderness shining through it.

She tossed a letter bearing a foreign postmark into her lap, saying, with a shy smile:

"Read that, you blessed little woman, and tell me what you think of it."

It was a manly, earnest epistle from the young Marquis De Perrine, telling her of the love he had entertained for her ever since forming her acquaintance in Paris, and making her a formal offer of his heart, hand, and fortune. At the same time he made a full confession of his unmanly treatment of Margaret and her maid upon a certain occasion, and his deep repentance for having been guilty of so mean an act. He related all that had oc-

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curred, and how humiliated he had been by Margaret's well-merited reproof and scorn.

"It was the beginning of a new life to me," he wrote, "and if all women were as true to their sex and their duty as Miss Houghton proved herself to be, there would be fewer bad men in the world."

He closed with an earnest appeal that he might be allowed to come to America to claim the love he sought.

"Are you going to let him come?" Margie asked, regarding her friend earnestly.

"Yes; we have been corresponding for some time; but I cannot resist this appeal," Ada responded, with a deeper flush.

"I thought," Margaret began, then stopped.

"You thought that I loved my cousin Arthur," Ada said, completing the sentence for her, "and so did I for a time," she went on, "until I came home where I could think quietly by myself. Then I realized what a shallow, pleasure-loving nature he had; I knew he did not care for me, and I gradually found myself forgetting him."

"You are sure that it is not the glitter of a coronet that attracts you now, Ada?" Margaret asked.

She was so happy in her husband's love, and the deep affection she bore him, she could not endure the thought of her friend giving her hand without her heart.

"No, Margie, I feel sure I should have told Auguste to come if he had still been simply Mons. Perrine. I admired him when we were in Paris, though I am afraid his suit would have been ruined if I had known of his treatment of you. But his letters indicate that here is much that is noble and good in him, and I am sure he has truly repented of his errors."

"I am, too," Margaret replied, and then she told her of his sister coming to her the evening before her marriage, of the message he had sent her, together with her beautiful gift.

"If you love him I am glad for you, Ada," she said; "it is a brilliant prospect for you, and it will be so much better for him to marry a good, true American girl than some pleasure-loving French lady."

So there was a quiet wedding one morning not long

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after, in Mrs. Parker's stately mansion, when Ada became the Marquis De Perrine.

When Margaret, who was one of the guests, went forward to offer her congratulations, the young marquis caught her hand, and lifting it to his lips, said:

"Madam, I thank you for so much, but most of all for my wife; but for you I should never have won her."

"How so?" Margaret asked, smiling, yet astonished.

"Because I never could have been worthy; ah, pardon!" he added, with a fond glance into his bride's flushed face. "I am not worthy even now, but you taught me to regard life very differently from what I had ever done before, and saved me from dishonoring the name I bear."

One night, five years later, the bell of Margaret Forest's beautiful home rang a resounding peal.

The servant, upon answering it, found a stout, fine-looking man standing outside the door, who inquired for Mr. Albert Forest.

He gave no name; he said he had come upon a matter of business, and wished to see the gentleman alone.

He was shown into the library, and as he sat there waiting, the sound of happy childish voices came floating down from up stairs, and the man's face kindled with a strange tenderness and love as he heard it.

Presently Mr. Forest entered the room, and he did not seem a day older than when he had returned from abroad several years before.

He bowed to his visitor, but regarded him curiously, as if wondering if he had ever seen him before.

The stranger arose and advanced to meet him.

"Uncle Albert," he said, in a low, moved tone, "I do not deserve a welcome from you, but, nevertheless, I yearn for it."

"Arthur!" cried Mr. Forest, springing toward him and grasping him warmly by the hand, while something in the open, manly face before him moved him strangely.

"Yes, it is Arthur—the prodigal returned," the man replied, sadly, yet with a touch of bitterness in his tone.

"You know how the father received the prodigal, Arthur," said Mr. Forest, with a tremble in his voice, "and so I give you the warmest welcome of which I am capable.

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"Thank you, Uncle Albert—I did not quite expect that, but I am grateful; and now I will tell you that my chief errand here was to pay you the debt I owe you."

He took a paper from his pocket-book as he spoke and handed it to Mr. Forest.

It was a check on a New York bank for fifteen thousand dollars, which included the sum Mr. Forest had paid in settlement of Arthur's debts.

"Arthur, you know I did not expect this," said his uncle, regarding it gravely.

"No, but it is right, for all that; and I know you will not refuse me the satisfaction that I experience in doing it," Arthur replied, earnestly; and then at his uncle's invitation he sat down and told him how he had spent his life during the last six years.

After leaving Paris, he said he had come directly to New York, with the intention of making amends, as far as possible, for the mistakes of his early life. Here, he had fallen in with a man who had just returned from the South and whose health was such that he could not return to that enervating climate. He was the owner of a fine orange plantation, the fruit of which was nearly ready to be gathered. He was desirous of selling and would take a moderate price, provided he could find some reliable purchaser, who would pay part down and give him security for the rest.

Arthur at once said he would go and look at the property, and if he found it as represented, he would purchase. The result was, he became the owner, and the yield of that year alone, with the ten thousand dollars received from his uncle, enabled him to pay for the plantation entire and to make some improvements besides.

"I have attended strictly to business," he said, in conclusion, "and I have reaped my reward. I have become a successful fruit grower, and I am in a fair way to become a rich man myself in a few years; and so you see, Uncle Albert, I could not feel a proper respect for myself until I had paid this debt, and expressed my appreciation of your kindness to me."

"It was really no debt, Arthur; you were welcome to it," returned Mr. Forest, heartily, yet he was glad he had paid it, for it raised him greatly in his estimation.

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"I know—but of course you can imagine how I would feel about it," Arthur responded, and there the matter was dropped.

"Where are you stopping?" his uncle asked him a few moments later.

"We are at Parker's."

"We?" repeated Mr. Forest, inquiringly.

"Yes," with a laugh and a tender light illuminating his face, "I have married a nice little Southern lady, and we have a fine boy three years old."

"Well, well; that is good news truly, and I am glad with you, Arthur. I shall pay my respects to that same little lady to-morrow, and then you must bring her here," said Mr. Forest, cordially, and looking very much pleased over the news.

"I—I don't know about that——" Arthur began, but was cut short by the entrance of Louis.

The meeting was somewhat awkward on Arthur's part, but Louis was very cordial; there was nothing in his manner to remind him of the past and he seemed to be heartily glad to learn of his prosperity.

Margaret went with Mr. Forest the next day, to call upon the Aspinwalls at the Parker House, and Arthur voted her the noblest woman in the universe for the act. She found Mrs. Aspinwall a refined and lady-like little body, devotedly attached to her husband, and possessing an unbounded influence over him.

Their boy was a promising little fellow, the image of his father, who evidently worshiped his son, although it was patent to his visitors that he did not intend to spoil him by indulgence.

"If I can train him to be anything like you, I shall feel that I have not lived in vain," Arthur remarked to Louis, when, after a month of pleasant intercourse between the families the Aspinwalls were about to leave for their Southern home.

"The memory of your kindness and generosity," he added, "has never left me for a moment; they have helped to make me a better man; and at last I began to feel as if I had earned the right to come and ask you to forgive me."

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It was a hard thing for a proud, high-spirited man to say; but it was a noble thing to do—it was the one thing needful to crown his manhood.

"Gladly," Louis said, grasping his hand warmly. "Let us remember the past no more; let us be friends henceforth."

* * * * * * * * *

Margaret Houghton's keys, aided by her heroism and courage, unlocked the doors of her lover's prison and conquered the enemy that had so nearly destroyed her happiness.

But a nobler victory was won when the keys of kindness and nobility unlocked a well-nigh impenetrable heart; while the demons of enmity and jealousy fled, angels of peace and good will entered in their place, and a human soul was saved, a life of usefulness preserved.

[THE END.]

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